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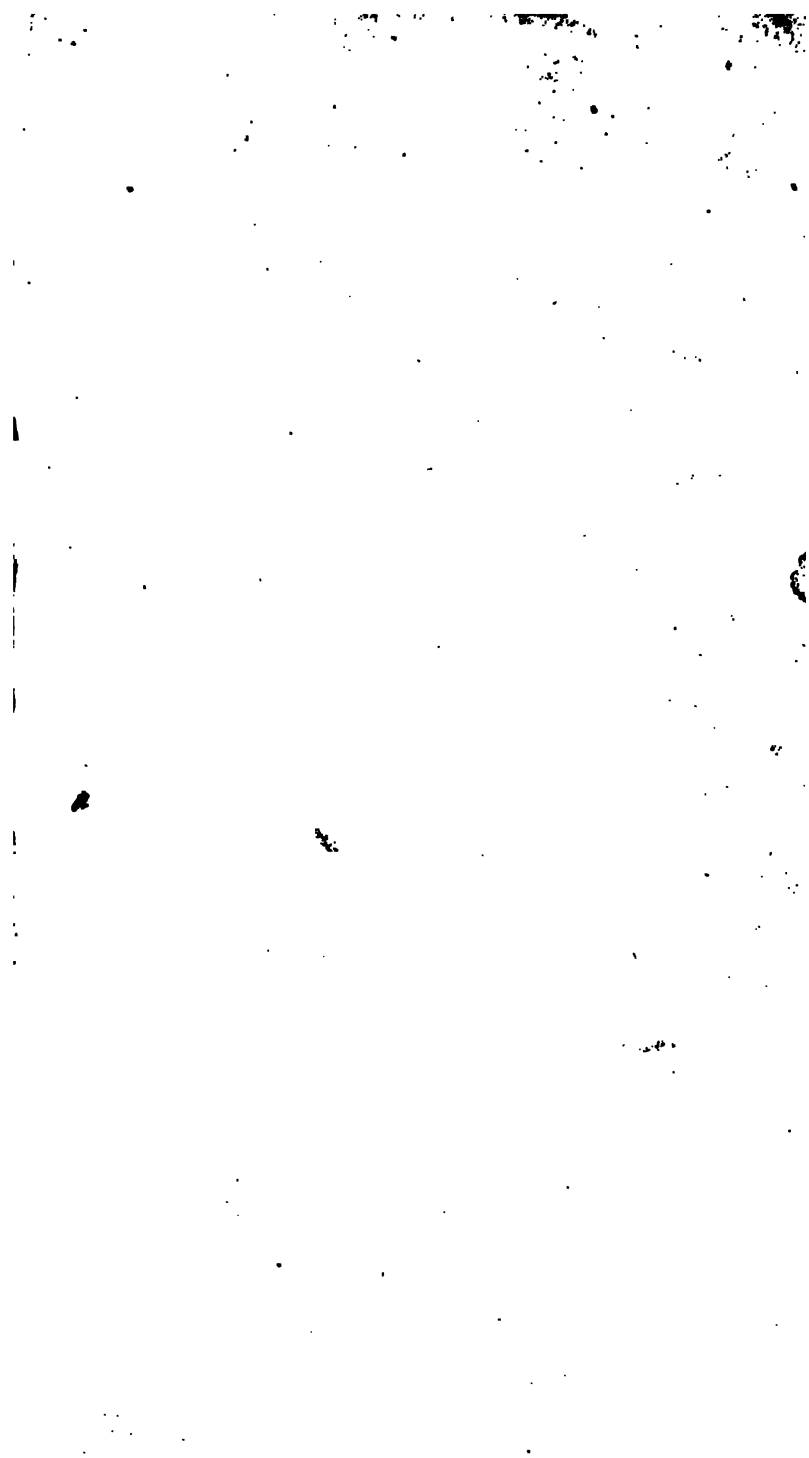
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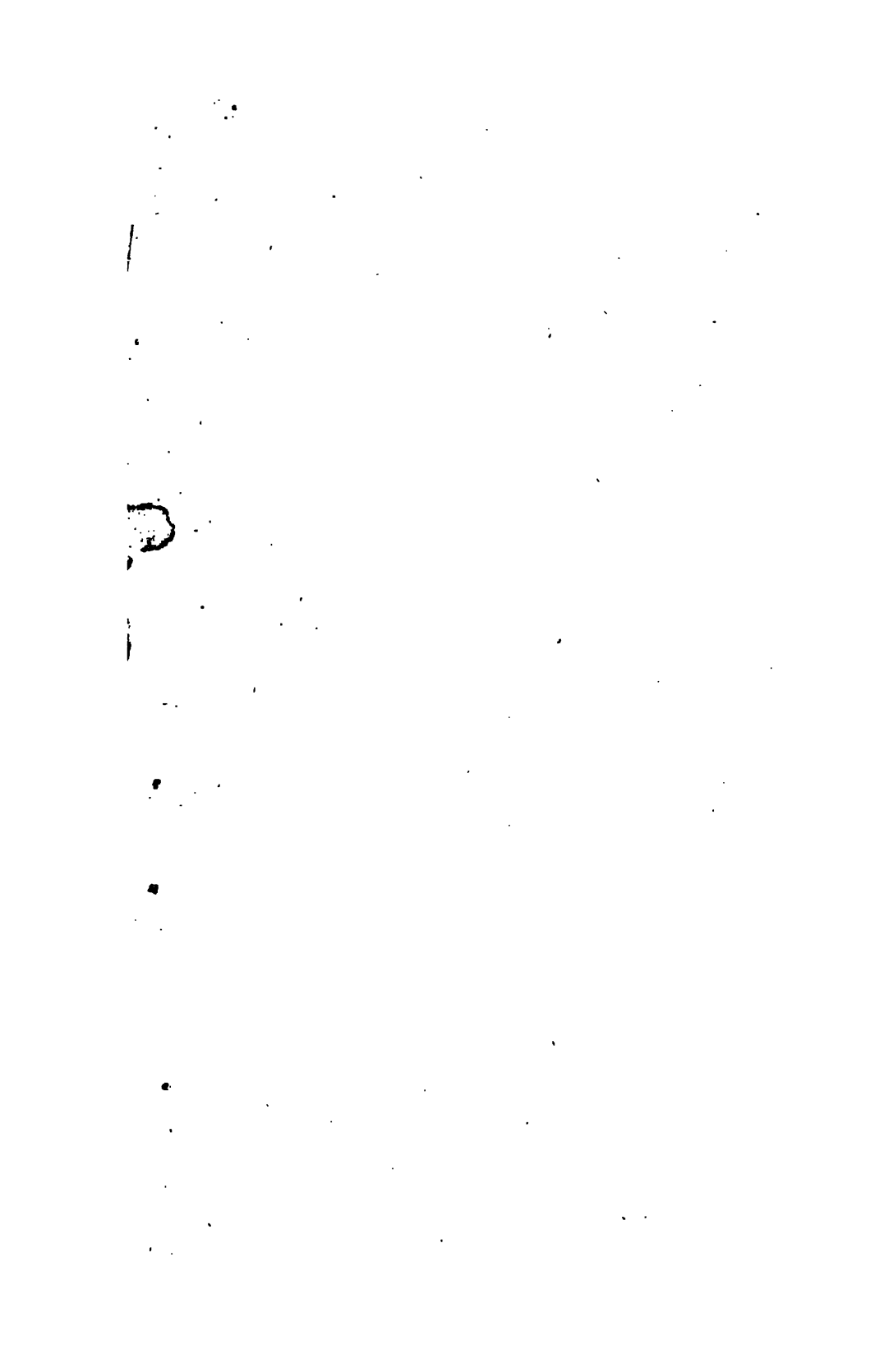
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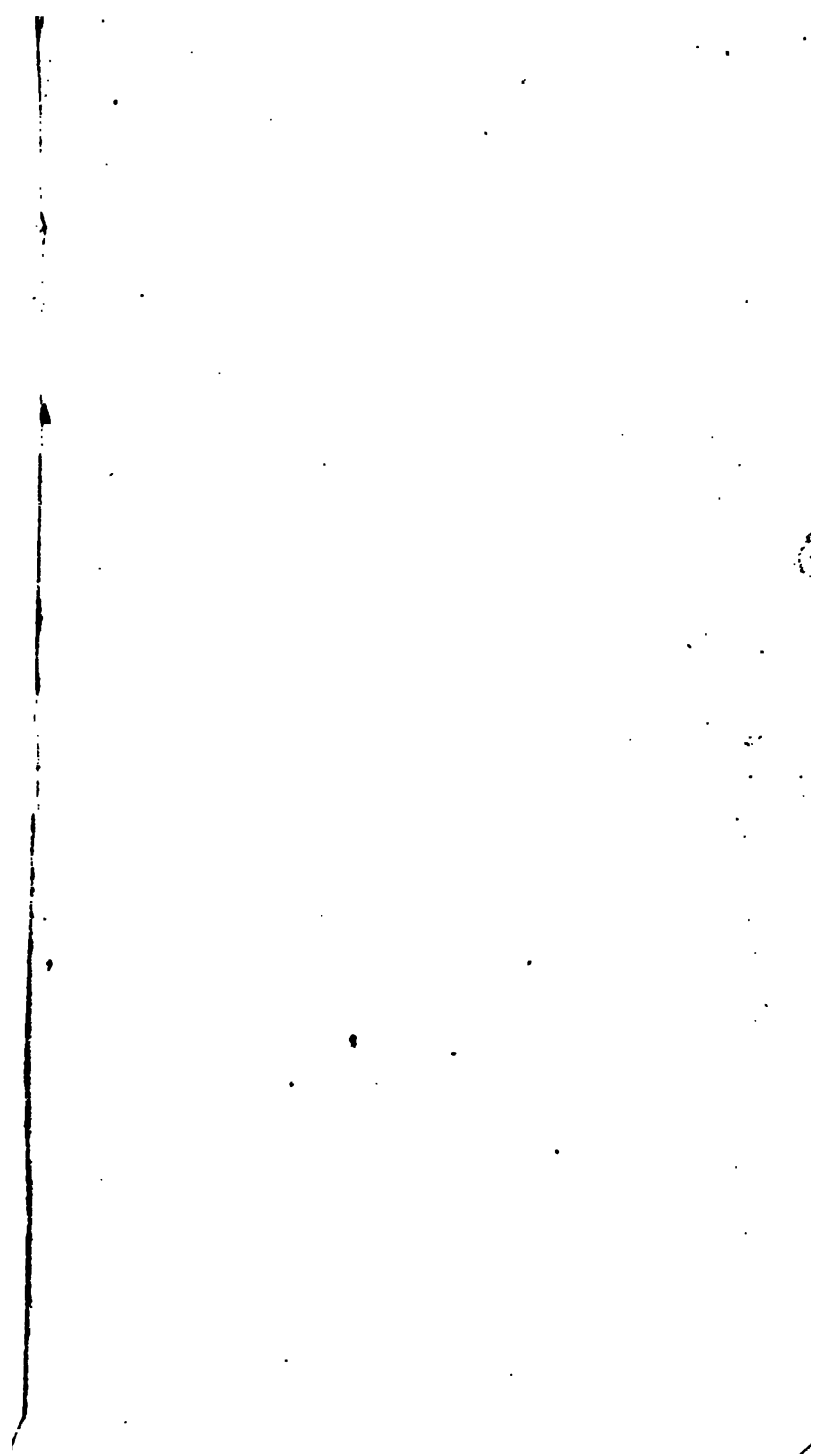
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ON THE
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OF
RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

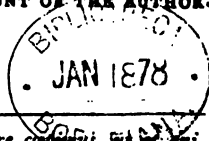
FROM THE FRENCH

OF

Mons. NECKER.

A NEW TRANSLATION,

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.



*Pristinis orbatî muneribus, hæc studia renovare cupimus, ut et ani-
mus molestiis hæc potissimum relevaretur, et prodessemus civibus nos-
tris quæ re cumque possemus.*

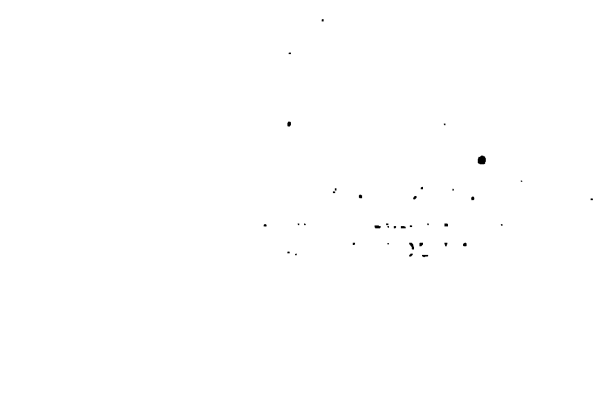
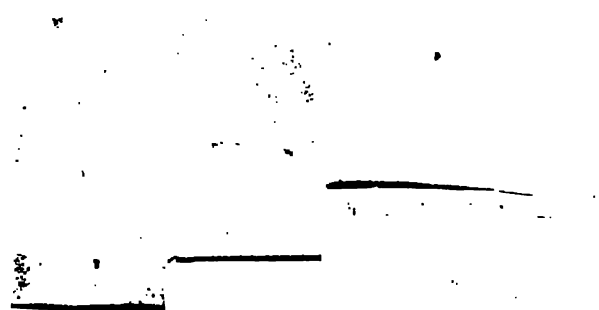
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141. j. 385.



P R E F A C E by the Editors,

W I T H A

SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

NO piece of literary labour is generally esteemed easier, or more readily undertaken than translation. As it requires not the mind to be exerted in the discovery or arrangement of new truths, in deductions of reasoning, or flights of fancy; and all that the translator has to do, is to express the reasonings and sentiments of another, in a language different from that in which they were originally written; it is therefore thought a task, to the performance of which, rather patient industry than genius or knowledge is requisite.

These ideas concerning the merits of translation, have contributed to render translations more numerous, and the labour, at the same time, more contemptible. Humble as the task is, yet, while there are so many readers among us, and the majority of these are more eager in the search of novelty than of truth,—attempts will be naturally made to gratify their curiosity, not merely by original compositions in their native tongue, but by rendering the stores of ancient and foreign languages easily accessible to them. And, as vanity or necessity have always tempted many more to write, than were well qualified to instruct or to please,—those who feel themselves thus impelled to become authors, without having any intellectual treasures of their own to distribute, are willing to avail themselves of the trifling advantages which may be gain-

ed by labouring humbly on the thoughts and words of others. But, whatever he himself may fancy, or whatever may be the general opinion of the world,—the man who has few thoughts of his own, will seldom be able to distinguish himself by peculiar excellence in expressing the thoughts of others: There subsists a certain connection between language and ideas, so intimate, that no mind can ever be eminently master of the one, which is barren of the other. Besides, he whose abilities are not such as to enable him to translate well, can scarcely be expected to make a judicious choice of books to be translated. His objects being either the acquisition of that very inferior degree of fame, which consists in being known as the translator of a book, or the pitiful sum which may be obtained for the copy of a translation,—he naturally enquires, not what book is best suited to his own turn of mind and degree of knowledge, nor what book is most highly distinguished for science or elegance or virtuous sentiments, unknown or but little known in his native language,—but what book is most likely to attract the curiosity of the great mass of readers: Careless whether its tendency be to foment the passions, and pervert the understanding, or to rectify the judgment and refine the feelings of the heart; whether it be the production of learning and genius, exerted under the direction of sound taste, or the effusion of empty conceit. Hence those myriads of Novels, Histories, Voyages, and Travels that are every year presented to the English reader, in a sort of Babylonish dialect, which is not language, but a jarring mixture of the most anomalous idioms of different languages, and said to be translations from the French or the German.

It is much to be wished, that both original writers and translators would consider seriously, in what instances their labours can be beneficial to the world; and that

readers would reflect, from what species of reading they are most likely to reap advantage. The object of the student's enquiries ought undoubtedly to be, such an acquaintance with the appearances of nature, and the productions and operations of art, as may enable him, in any situation, to chuse the best ends, and to pursue these by the most suitable means. For this purpose, he is to observe, with peculiar diligence, the phænomena of the human mind and the appearances which society exhibits, to study the laws of matter and motion, to examine the œconomy of the inferior animals and of the vegetable kingdom, to count the number and trace the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. And, as the limited sphere of every individual's observation forbids him to hope, solely from his own industry, however indefatigable, a sufficient acquaintance with all these objects; hence it becomes necessary for him whose enquiries are directed to such an end, to dedicate much of his time to books; which may make known to him the remarks of others, may call his attention to objects which, though of high importance, might otherwise escape even from under his eye unnoticed, and may rouse in his mind, an emulation and an energy which he would not otherwise feel. Books may be likewise considered by the student in a different point of view. Besides exciting in his breast a generous emulation, and leading him, at times, by a shorter and easier way, to the knowledge of nature; they afford, themselves, a new field for observation. They are not only, as it were, cabinets of natural curiosities, in which specimens collected from different parts of nature are elegantly and methodically arranged, but exhibit also a rude and careless assemblage of objects, which may attract the notice of the curious observer, in the same way as a newly discovered island, abounding in peculiar

animals and plants and fossils, would draw the attention of the Naturalist. Such being the purposes of study, and such the uses of books, we may naturally infer that books not formed to contribute in an eminent degree to these ends, can scarcely merit the student's attention. A writer will, no doubt, be disposed to regard himself as a man of no small consequence, even though he communicate but little useful information in a direct way, if he can only succeed in affording general entertainment. But no writer will attempt this successfully, whose book does not contain some faithful delineations of the appearances of external nature or of human life, or some happy new combinations of those incidents and images which the common appearances of nature and life, and the ordinary course of things, afford. The reader, the writer, the translator, therefore, lose, or at least deserve to lose, their labour, when they keep not these great objects in view.

The book, to a new Translation of which we prefix these observations, is the work of a celebrated man, on an important subject. Although the doctrines, precepts, and promises of Religion seldom influence the sentiments and conduct of mankind, so powerfully as might be wished; yet they contribute so much to support the order of society,—that small portion of disinterested virtue which appears in the world, is so absolutely dependent on them,—and they are so invariably the resource to which, even those who at happier times regard them with indifference, flee for consolation and support under sickness and sorrow; that perhaps no subject of higher importance, or more generally interesting, can be, at any time, offered to the attention of the human mind. And, since the influence of religious principles is so beneficial; whatever can contribute to render it more powerful, will be surely considered as worthy, at least, of some notice.

The present Work appears happily calculated to remove many of the prejudices which the most respectable of the enemies of Religion, those who though unfriendly to Religion, are yet not hostile to moral virtue and social order, entertain against it. It offers no apology for fanaticism or superstition. Its design is not to defend the peculiarities of any particular system of Religion, or to dress out the whims of any sect in an alluring garb. Our Author's reasonings are not directed against the Pagan, the Mahometan, the Jew, or the Deist; neither does he labour to persuade the Papist to turn Protestant, or the Protestant to turn Quaker. He labours chiefly to combat an opinion, which, however unjust, has never been so prevalent as among the geniuses of this enlightened age,—That Religion contributes little or nothing to the support of social order or civil government; and another, naturally resulting from this,—That it were better, if religious establishments were entirely abolished, and the support of morality trusted solely to civil laws and the moral feelings of the human heart: In contradiction to these opinions, M. NECKER asserts, that the principles of Religion and those of Morality are connected in the most intimate manner; and, that an established Religion is scarce less necessary than a code of civil laws, to the existence of a well regulated state. The inefficacy of civil laws for the prevention of crimes, the weakness of our virtuous feelings, when opposed by those of a contrary tendency, and the discontent which the view of the unequal distribution of property in Society must naturally excite in the minds of those to whom the smallest share has fallen,—are so many facts, which he urges to prove, that something more besides civil laws, and moral precepts, and the virtuous feelings of the human heart, is necessary to maintain the

order of Society. With candour, yet with vehement eloquence, he shews how happily the fundamental principles of Religion are calculated to repress crimes, to support integrity and justice, to cherish benevolence; and thus to render men friends and brothers, who would otherwise regard each other with the ferocity of *ravening wolves*.

But when disposed to embrace Religion, on the idea of its being essentially necessary to the support of civil government, we will naturally prefer that system of Religion which contributes most eminently to this end. Christianity exerts a happy influence on the welfare of society, and is established through the greatest part of the civilized world. Our Author, therefore, through the whole of his Treatise, refers to Christianity as the Religion, the establishment of which must render mankind more virtuous and happy than moral precepts and civil laws can possibly do without such aid. Not content with recommending Religion, by proving its utility, he also examines with great industry and penetration, into the truth of a few of the leading doctrines of Natural and Revealed Religion, and establishes them by a variety of powerful arguments. He is not however, one of those cold reasoners who address only the understanding; he oftener addresses the heart; and not seldom, the reader will probably find, in that language which is best calculated to affect it.

THE general tendency of the Work, the elegance and spirit by which it is every where characterised, with the distinguished name of the Author, have induced us to think, that it might attract readers, and be read with advantage: And, as we cannot think the English dress in which it lately appeared, a very graceful one, we therefore venture to offer a new translation of it to the Public.

The former Translation has no doubt its merit ; but the Translator, from hurry, or some other cause, has often deviated entirely from the sense of the Author. Witness the following instance, selected from many others, (*Lond. Transf.* p. 329.) “ We should be very differently affected, if, for the first time, we contemplated the meanest part of this admirable whole ! but even then, in a little time, the strong conviction of the existence of a God would be *worn away, and become what it is at present.*” This sentence, if it can be said to have a meaning at all, surely bears one directly contrary to that of the Author. The intelligent reader will, at once, perceive, by glancing at the Author’s own words*, that he here earnestly wishes to inculcate this important truth, That a view of the wonders of nature is sufficient to convince, even the most inconsiderate persons, of the existence of a God.

With regard to the present Translation, we will only presume to say, that though it may often fall short of the spirit and elegance of the original, yet it does, in no instance, so far as we know, depart from the sense of the Author. Such liberties, however, have been always taken with peculiar modes of expression, as were thought necessary to avoid obscurity of diction in our language.

* — Ah ! combien nous serions émus différemment, si nous contemplions pour la première fois, l’une des plus foibles parties de ce merveilleux ensemble ! Qu’en peu de temps alors l’opinion de l’existence d’un Dieu paroîtroit vraisemblable à ceux qui s’en éloignent aujourd’hui davantage ! See p. 262. of the *present Translation*.

To gratify the curiosity of the Reader, we shall conclude with the following

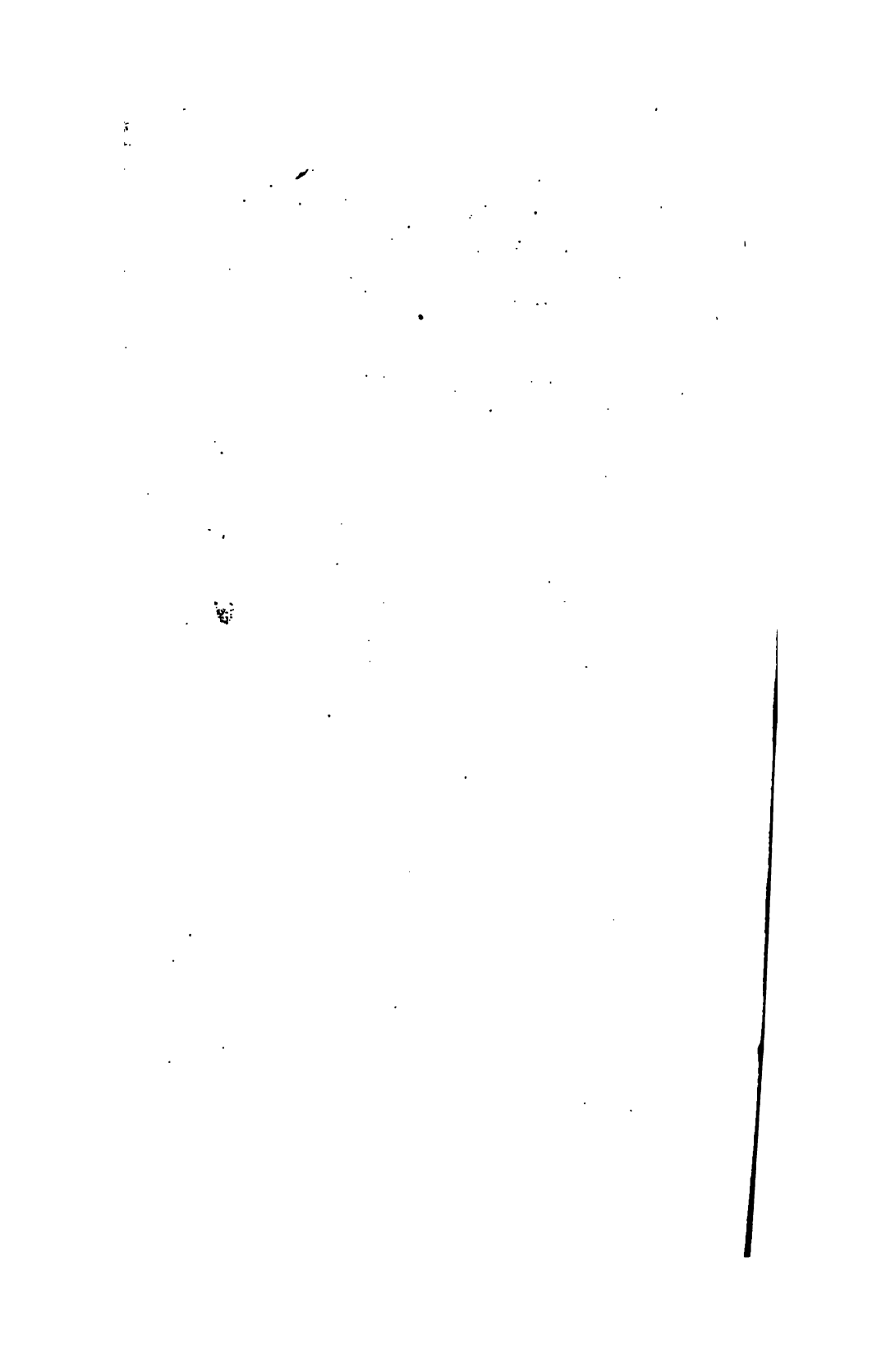
SHORT ACCOUNT of the AUTHOR.

MONS. NECKER is a Swiss by birth: His ancestors originally from Custrin. He was educated at Geneva, where his father was a Professor. In his youth, he frequently obtained the prize for literary performances at his college: He is said to have discovered an early inclination to poetical pursuits. Among other pieces, he wrote three comedies, in which his friends have asserted, may be found the wit and spirit of *MOLIERE*.

Even since he engaged in a political life, he has found leisure for poetical compositions. A satirical eulogium, entitled 'The happiness of Fools,' in imitation of Erasmus's 'Praise of Folly,' exhibits strong marks of a mind capable of very opposite pursuits. He entered very young into the office of his uncle *Mons. VERNET* at Paris, and in a very short time, was found sufficiently qualified to take the direction of the house. When he was about twenty-five years of age, he became known to the *Abbé RAYNAL*, who soon discovered in him those great powers of mind, which have been since so eminently displayed in the management of the finances of France. He saw the interests of Commerce with the eye of a politician and a philosopher, of which his enquiries into the affairs of the East India Company may be adduced as a proof. Of his early writings, the most remarkable are his *Eloge on Colbert*, which obtained the prize at the Academy in 1773; his *Treatise on the Corn Trade*, of which four editions were printed in the space of one month; his collection of *Edicts with Notes*, presented to the King; his *Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France*; and his *Compte rendu au Roi*.

These laborious works, though sufficient to fill up the time of most men, have not so entirely occupied M. NECKER, as to prevent him from mixing in the world, where his deportment has been marked with all the traits of politeness and good breeding, which were so much prized by the late Lord CHESTERFIELD. At the time of a great scarcity, Geneva, the place of his education, was indebted to him for many beneficial advices. In 1776, he came to London, where he very speedily made himself master of the theory of the English Funds. At the end of that year, he was named Director of the Royal Treasury in France, and in the year after, Director General of the Finances. Removed from this elevated situation, he preserved in his retreat, the general esteem of mankind : The nation which he had governed, adored him for his integrity, and the minister who succeeded him, frequently asked his assistance. He constantly refused every gratification which his Sovereign was desirous of making him. His house was built according to his rank and fortune ; but amidst his wealth, he has preserved in his person the simplicity of a sage.

The annals of mankind have seldom shewn what is to be found in the accomplished Minister of France. A union of Politics and Philosophy. A mind formed to bear prosperity without insolence, and adversity without discontent. He alone, of all the French Cabinet, after many reverses of fortune, and amid the present convulsions of the State, has been able, by his exemplary patience and moderation, at once to conciliate the affection of the Sovereign and of the people. In short, that spirit of benevolence and liberality which forms the prominent feature of his character as a Statesman, may perhaps have contributed not a little to pave the way for a revolution in the French Government, which may transmit his name with lustre to posterity.



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INTRODUCTION.

WHEN, on my retiring from public life, my thoughts ceased to be occupied in consulting the welfare and dignity of the state as a political body, or in directing the operations of Government to the security and happiness of its subjects, I found myself almost without any object of pursuit, which might render life sufficiently interesting. Restless and uneasy in this vacuity, my soul, still active, felt the want of employment. At first I formed the design of writing down my observations on men and manners: I imagined that long experience amidst those active scenes which discover the passions, had taught me to know them well: But elevating my views, I became
A animated

2 INTRODUCTION.

animated with an ambition of reconciling the most sublime contemplations with those studies which I was constrained to relinquish. Pursuing this train of thought, I remarked with satisfaction, that there exists a natural connection amongst the various truths which contribute to the happiness of mankind. Our prejudices and our passions, often attempt to disunite them ; but to an attentive observer, they are all seen to spring from one common origin. By the effect of this affinity,—the comprehensive views of administration,—the spirit of laws,—morality and religious sentiments, are all intimately connected. By maintaining this beautiful alliance, a rampart is raised around those great works which are destined for the prosperity of States and the tranquillity of Nations.

Whoever has taken an active part in the management of public business, and made it, for any length of time, the object of his attention ;—whoever has compared the various relations of the great whole with the natural dispositions of minds and characters,—in short, whoever has observed the opposite interests, and perpetual competitions of mankind, must be convinced, how much the best regulated government needs the aid of that invisible spring, which exerts its secret influence on the consciences of men. Thus, whilst I now attempt to communicate some reflections on the importance

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importance of Religious Opinions, I am not led so far from my usual habit of thinking, as might, at the first glance, be imagined. When treating of the Management of the Finances, I omitted no argument which might tend to demonstrate, That there is a close connection between the efficacy of Governments and the wisdom of their administration ; between the virtue of a Sovereign and the confidence of his people : I still, methinks, follow the same train of sentiments, whilst, astonished at the indifference which too generally prevails, I endeavour to reunite the moral duties of mankind to those principles which are their genuine and most natural support.

After studying the interests of a Great Nation, and surveying the whole extent of our political societies, one may, perhaps, approach nearer those sublime ideas, which connect the general structure of the human race with that Infinite and Almighty Being, the first grand cause of all, and the great Ruler of the Universe.

It is true, that in the bustle of an active administration, such contemplations cannot be indulged : But they are insensibly formed and prepared, even amidst the tumult of business ; and the tranquillity of retirement enables us to extend and complete them.

The calm which succeeds the hurry of active life, appears to be the period most favourable to reflection. If any remembrance, or retrospective views of what is past, should infuse into your mind a degree of melancholy, you will be insensibly led back towards those thoughts which so long occupied your attention. Thus, the mariner, when he has renounced the dangers of the sea, sometimes seats himself on the beach, and there observes, with tranquillity, the vast ocean, the regular succession of the waves, the effect of the winds, the flux and reflux of the tide, and the spacious firmament, where, during the night, amongst lights innumerable, he distinguishes the lucid point which guides the navigator in his course.

Those who fill the high stations under Government, in vain strive with assiduity, to promote the general happiness of mankind. Though deeply sensible of the important duties of office, in vain does a public character undertake the cause of the people, and labour incessantly to defend the weak against the attacks of the powerful. In this attempt he soon perceives his own defect of ability, and the narrow limits of sovereign authority itself. Pity for the unfortunate is checked by the laws of civil right; generosity and benevolence, by justice; and liberty, by its own abuses. We observe a constant struggle between

I N T R O D U C T I O N. 5

tween merit and interest ;—honour and fortune ;—patriotism and selfishness. Those intervals in which the passions are truly unbiassed are but momentary ; and unless some weighty circumstances, or a vigorous and salutary exertion of administration, forcibly recal a sense of the public good, a general languor pervades every mind, and society sinks into a confused mass of blended and opposite interests ; in which supreme authority only endeavours to maintain peace, without concern for any actual harmony, and without desire to promote any favourable change, in the manners or happiness of the people.

Amidst these jarrings and contradictions, which are always recurring, a minister disposed to reflection, is perpetually reminded of the imperfect state of things. He feels regret, no doubt, while he contemplates the great disproportion between his duties and his abilities ; and sometimes he is discouraged, on discovering the obstacles and difficulties which he must surmount. He rears, with much labour, some bulwarks on the bank, the waters rise, the torrent swells ; his first precautions becoming insufficient, he must renew his works ; and these being again thrown down, he is thus engaged in a continual succession of fruitless toil and unavailing attempts. What then might be the consequence were the salutary tie of religious sentiments to be broken ? How dread-

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ful would be the event were the operation of that powerful spring ever entirely destroyed? Soon should we see the whole social structure shaken from its foundation, and the hand of Government no longer able to sustain the huge and tottering edifice.

The Sovereign, and the Laws which are the interpreters of his wisdom, should have two great objects in view,—to maintain public order;—and to promote the happiness of individuals. But to accomplish this double purpose, the assistance of Religion is indispensably necessary. It is only by extending his cares to the general welfare of the community, that a Sovereign can promote the happiness of mankind; because such feelings as arise from the characters or peculiar situations of particular persons, are not dependent on him. He can only secure the public order by Rules and Laws solely applicable to actions, and merely to such actions too, as can be distinctly defined. Besides, these laws should be applicable to Society in a uniform manner; and they should always have a tendency to diminish the number of exceptions, shades and modifications by which the characters of its members are diversified, in order to prevent the abuses inseparable from arbitrary decisions.

Such

I N T R O D U C T I O N. 7

Such is the procedure of sovereign authority; such the necessary display of its means and its powers. Religion, to accomplish the same ends, follows a very different course. It is not in a vague and general manner that she influences the happiness of men: It is by addressing them, as it were, one by one: By penetrating into the heart of each individual, and infusing into the soul consolation and hope: By presenting to the imagination the strongest attractions; and by taking possession of mens opinions, and occupying their thoughts. Availing herself of this dominion over them, she sustains their courage, and affords them comfort under the disappointments and afflictions incident to human life. In like manner, Religion contributes to the maintenance of public order, by means absolutely distinct from those employed by Government: For she not only regulates our actions, but our sentiments; checking the errors, and restraining the inclinations of each individual. By representing the Deity as knowing every secret thought, and as present on all occasions, she exerts an habitual authority over the consciences of men: She seems to watch over their emotions, and to pursue them in all their subterfuges: Equally attentive to their intentions, their actions and their remorse, she seems, in her varied course, as yielding and flexible, as the despotic empire of the law appears immovable and constrained.

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I ought not, in this place, to extend these reflections farther ; but I must add, that if Religion, in some measure, completes the imperfect work of legislation,—if she must supply the defect of those means which Government is under the necessity of adopting, the subject of which I propose to treat, seems not to be foreign to those objects of consideration which the study of administration ought to comprehend.

I am well aware, that we cannot explain the importance of Religious Opinions, without, at the same time, fixing our attention on those great truths on which they depend ; and thus we must touch upon some questions closely connected with the deepest metaphysics. We are, at least, obliged to seek a defence against those arguments which sap the foundation of the most necessary opinions, and repress the most interesting and impassioned sentiments of the human mind : arguments by which some have attempted, to reduce man to a vegetable,—to make the existence of the universe, the result of chance,—and morality, a mere state trick.

When I foresaw the immense latitude of my subject, I was, no doubt, intimidated ; but I could not think this a sufficient reason for relinquishing my undertaking : And since most of the philosophers of the present times have united
against

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against those opinions which the light of Nature itself seems to have rendered sacred, it is become necessary to admit almost all who may offer themselves to the combat ; and even to select a champion from the main body of the army, since those of superior rank have gone over to the enemy's camp.

Besides there is no subject of contemplation which seems more proper to employ the attention of reflecting minds, than metaphysical enquiries ; for it is by thought alone that they can be fathomed. The light we obtain on this subject by acquired knowledge, is in some measure lost, in the obscure depths we must sound, and in the vast space we must traverse, in search of it : Thus it were better, perhaps, that every one should enter at random into those labyrinths where the paths already traced lead to no conclusion. Besides I have often observed, even in those studies where the assistance of science is indispensable, that a certain value is due to the particular efforts of each genius, which, tracing out a path for itself, and indebted to Nature alone for its peculiar formation, preserves in its progress a character of its own. It is then, and then only, that our mode of thinking becomes altogether divested of servility : And when those principles which we deduce from reflection, coincide with the opinions of others, this conformity
has

has nothing slavish in it, nor are the slightest marks of imitation recognizable.

In vain would man resist the impress of truth; in vain does he affect an absurd indifference and contempt for ancient opinions: No idea can be more worthy of our serious meditations, nor is there any on which it may be more allowable to expatiate, according to the utmost of our intelligence and penetration, than that most sublime one of a SUPREME BEING, to whom we are related: An idea, which though too immense for us to comprehend; yet every moment strikes the soul with deep admiration, and fills the heart with elevated hope.

There are concerns, methinks, which may be considered as patriotic by all intelligent and feeling beings: And while the inhabitants of the same country, and the subjects of the same prince, are constantly engaged in one common plan of defence, the Citizens of the World should, with an anxiety equally incessant, give every new and possible support to those exalted opinions on which the true dignity of their existence is founded; and which guard their imagination from the hideous prospect of an existence without origin, action without liberty, and futurity without hope. Thus after having, I think, proved

proved myself a citizen of France, by my administration and by my writings. I wish to unite myself to a community still more extensive,—that of the whole human race: in this manner may a person extend his utility through a wider circle, without withdrawing his affections from those with whom he is more immediately connected, or neglecting his primary and most important duties. This happy privilege we derive from our thinking faculties, that spiritual portion of ourselves which can comprehend the past, dart into futurity, and deeply interest itself in the destiny of men of all countries and of all ages. A veil is, no doubt, drawn over the greater part of those truths which our curiosity would lead us to investigate; but those which a beneficent God has permitted us to discern, are amply sufficient to guide and instruct us; and we cannot at all times divert our attention from them, without being guilty of supine negligence, and a total indifference to the superior interests of men. How diminutive, indeed, do all things appear when compared with those contemplations, which extend the span of our existence, and by detaching us from the dust of the earth, seem to unite our souls to the infinity of space, and our duration of a day to eternity itself! Above all, this is worthy of your consideration, ye who possess sensibility.

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and who feel the want of a Supreme Being, who look for that support from him, so necessary to your weakness, who seek in him that guardian and protector, without whom, painful solicitude will perpetually assail you, and destroy those soft and tender affections which constitute your happiness.

I must say, there perhaps never was a period, when there was a more pressing necessity for recalling to the minds of men, the high importance of religious sentiments: For they are to be considered merely as prejudices, if we may give credit to the present spirit of licentiousness and levity,—to the laws dictated by the fashionable world, and what is still more essential,—to those philosophical dissertations which prompt and support the foolish suggestions of fancy and vanity.

There is no form of Religion, doubtless, to which notions more or less mystical have not been attached; nor in which those opinions have not been taught and defended in a dictatorial manner, and in a tone of authority by no means proportioned to the evidence adduced in their support. This being the case, there have, at all times, been disputes about particular modes of worship which different nations have adopted:

But

But it is chiefly in the present age, that a certain class of men have sprung up, of eminent wit and abilities, who, being intoxicated by the facility of their victory, have carried their ambition still farther, and have daringly ventured to attack the reserved body of that army of which the front ranks had already given way.

The struggle between those who would imperiously demand implicit assent to their opinions, with others who pretend they ought to reject every thing with disdain that is not demonstrated, will always be a fruitless combat, and can only be productive of blind aversion and unjust contempt. Some endeavour to injure their adversaries, others only to humble them ; while the good of mankind, and the true benefit of society, are totally left out of view in the contest. Yes, the real love of useful truths, the impartial search after them, and the desire of pointing them out, these sentiments, so amiable, so truly estimable, seem to be entirely unknown. I see, permit me to say it, I see at the opposite extremities of the arena, the savage inquisitor, and the inconsiderate philosopher : But neither the faggots lighted by the one, nor the derisions of the other, will ever diffuse any salutary instruction. In the eyes of a rational man, the severities of the monks add no more to the sway of
true

true religious sentiments, than the jests of some licentious wits have effected a just triumph in favour of philosophy.

Between such opposite opinions, and amidst so many deviations which are equally dangerous, we must endeavour to mark out our path. All the opinions of mankind are subject to change; and, now, when the minds of men are become, more than ever, averse to maxims of intolerance, the fundamental principles of Religion chiefly need our support. Such is the daily decay of these principles, that to prepare some means by which their use may be superseded, seems, at present, to be an object with the public in general. Of late we have heard of nothing but the necessity of composing a moral Catechism, in which no Religious Principles whatever should be introduced,—those antiquated resources, which ought to have been, by this time, totally discarded.

These principles might be more effectually attacked, could they ever be represented as useless for the maintenance of public order; and could the dull lessons of political philosophy be substituted in place of those sublime ideas, which, by the spiritual tie of Religion, bind the heart and mind to the purest morality. Let us examine

mine if we should gain any thing by the exchange ; let us see if the means proposed can be put in competition with those for which they are substituted, as being more solid and efficacious. Let us enquire, if this newly recommended doctrine, will diffuse into the soul the same degree of consolation ; if it be calculated for those hearts which are possessed of sensibility : Above all, let us consider attentively, if it can be accommodated to the capacity, to the degree of intelligence, and to the social situation of the greater part of mankind. In short, when we take into view the various considerations which are connected, in one way or another, with the important subject we propose to treat, we cannot hesitate boldly to oppose, with all our might, the vain ambition of those who, availing themselves of superior abilities, endeavour to deprive man of all his dignity, to place him on a level with the dust under his feet, and to render his foresight a punishment :—Unhappy and deplorable fate ! from which, however, we are permitted to seek for a defence : Cruel and disastrous opinion ! which tears up by the root every thing around it ; which relaxes the most necessary bands, and at once destroys the most delightful charm of life.

O Thou God unknown ! but whose beneficent idea has ever filled my soul, If ever Thou throwest a look on those efforts which man can make to approach Thee, sustain my resolution, enlighten my understanding, exalt my thoughts, and reject not the desire I have to unite still more, if possible, the order and happiness of Society, with an intimate and just conception of Thy divinity, and a lively conviction of this sublime truth, that THOU ART !



ON THE
IMPORTANCE
OF
RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

CHAP. I.

The connection of Religious Opinions with Public Order.

WE have no distinct knowledge of the origin of most political societies. So soon, however, as history exhibits to us men united in a national body, we, at the same time, discover the establishment of a public worship, and the application of religious opinions to support the laws established for the preservation of good order and subordination. Religious sentiments, by the sanction of an oath, bind the people to the Magistrates, and the Magistrates to their engagements; they inspire a sacred respect for obligations contracted between Sovereigns; and these sentiments, more powerfully than discipline, attach the Soldier to his Commander. In short their influence on the manners of individuals, has produced many of those great actions re-

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corded in history, many instances of noble disinterestedness, in which the Citizen has devoted himself to danger or death for his country. But as a philosophy has, of late, sprung up among the most enlightened nations, anxiously employed in derogating from the respect due to Religion, dissertations on remote times, and the various systems they absurdly attached to Religion, would become an endless source of controversy. Let us then support the cause we have undertaken to defend, by reasoning alone,—that operation of the mind, which is common to all countries and to all ages. There is perhaps something weak and servile in our wishing to derive aid from ancient opinions: Reason ought not, like vanity, to deck herself with old parchments, or display a genealogical tree: More dignified in her walk, and proud of her immortal nature, she ought to derive every thing from herself; and without depending on ancestors, she should become, so to speak, the contemporary of all ages.

It was reserved particularly for the Philosophers of the present age, to question even the utility of Religion, and to endeavour to substitute in place of its energetic influence, the dull instructions of political philosophy. Religion, say they, is a scaffolding fallen to ruins, it is time to give morality a more solid support. But what shall that support be? In order to discover it,
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and to form a just idea of its nature, we must consider particularly the various motives conducive to morality, which depend on the relative situations of men, and then estimate the kind and degree of aid that may be reasonably expected from such influence.

I think it is easy to conjecture what means those philosophers seek to employ, after renouncing the efficacious aid of Religion: They would avail themselves, doubtless, of the connection which subsists between the interest of individuals and that of the public: They would make use of the authority of the laws, and hold out the terror of punishments; and they would, above all, rely on the ascendancy of public opinion, and the ambition which all men ought to have for the esteem and approbation of others.

Let us examine those different motives separately; And, first, directing our attention to the connection of the *private* with the *public* interest, let us see if there subsists any real union between them; and if we can deduce from such principles, any moral instructions which may prove truly efficacious.

SOCIETY is very far from being a perfect structure. We can by no means consider as an harmonious composition, the various connections which we daily witness; especially the habitual contrast of power and weakness,—slavery and

authority,—riches and poverty,—luxury and misery : So many inequalities, and such a motley piece, could not form an edifice respectable for the justness of its proportions.

Civil and political order has then nothing excellent in its own nature. We cannot perceive its advantages till we have accurately studied, not only those circumstances of which the legislature must avail itself, but also the obstacles which it must surmount. It is only by deep reflection, therefore, that we come to discover how those singular connections, established by the social laws, form the system best calculated to balance and unite such an immense diversity of interests. Here then occurs a weighty objection to the influence of political morality, 'That we must assume an abstract and complicated idea as the basis of our love of order.' What effect would the scientific harmony of the great whole produce on a vulgar mind, when put in competition with the perpetual sense of injustice and inequality, which arises from the aspect of every part of the social constitution, when viewed in a detached and partial manner? And how inconsiderable is the number of those who are able to connect all the links of this vast chain?

In the best regulated societies, some must, unavoidably, enjoy all the comforts and conveniences of life, without toil and without trouble ; others, and by far the greater number, must be obliged

obliged to earn, with the sweat of their brows, the least possible recompense for their labours, a scanty subsistence : Some will be attended in their sickness, with all the care which officious tenderness and skill can afford, whilst others are reduced, in a public hospital, to partake of those moderate succours which the humanity of the Sovereign provides for indigence : Some must be in a condition to lavish on their family all the advantages of a long education, whilst others, impatient to free themselves of so burdensome a charge, are constrained to watch the first dawn of bodily strength, to employ their children in some profitable labour. In short, the splendour of riches must ever form a contrast with the rags of poverty. Such are the inevitable effects of the laws of private right. The principles of these truths, I have had an opportunity of discussing, in the work I composed on Administration and Political Economy ; but I must here repeat them, since they appear to be so closely connected with other general views. The eminent power of property has a more extensive influence than almost any other of our social institutions. This consideration was applicable to the right of the people, in the regulations regarding the victual-trade : It ought to be kept in view in tracing the duties of administration ; and it is still more important to the present subject, while we examine

mine what species of moral instruction is most suitable to mankind.

In short, since it is essential to the laws of civil right, to introduce and constantly support an unequal distribution of property; since it is essential to those laws, to reduce the most numerous class of mankind to the bare necessities of life; the unavoidable consequence of such a constitution must be, to maintain, among men, habitual sentiments of envy and jealousy. In vain would it be urged, That these laws alone can excite men to labour, animate industry, prevent disorder, and prove a check to acts of arbitrary authority. All these considerations, though, no doubt, sufficient to determine the opinion and will of the legislature, cannot strike, in the same manner, the abject wretch, without fortune, without resources, and without hope. Such a man could never pay willing homage to the beauty of the great whole, while he found nothing allotted to him but deformity, meanness and contempt.

In the greater part of political reasonings, men are misled by resemblances and analogies. The interest of society is certainly composed of the interests of all its members: But it follows not from this explication, that there is an immediate and constant correspondence between the general interest and the interest of individuals. Such approximation, such identity, could only be applicable

plicable to an imaginary social body, which might be represented as divided into several different parts, of which the rich might be considered as the head, the poor, the hands and the feet. Political society, however, cannot be considered as one united body, except under some particular relations; while, with regard to others, it is divided into as many ramifications as there are individuals.

What is called the *General Interest*, is often susceptible of many different constructions. It is indeed one of those principles which we are accustomed to receive, and transmit to others, in their most ordinary acceptation, without perceiving the complex ideas of which they are composed, till we have analysed them, in order to discover their consequences; in the same manner, as the diversity of colours in a ray of light, is not perceptible, till it is divided by the help of a prism.

The structure of the social laws may be justly esteemed one of our most admirable conceptions: Yet this system is not so closely united in all its parts, that any remarkable derangement would be the necessary consequence of a few irregular movements. A man who violates those laws, does not quickly discover the influence of his actions on the social interest: But he enjoys, or thinks he enjoys, immediate advantage from his crimes.

Were a Theatre to be on fire, it would, doubtless, be the general interest of the company that each should retire in regular order; but if the persons most distant from the entrance, believed they might escape sooner from the danger, by forcing their way through the surrounding crowd, they would assuredly resolve to commit that violence, unless prevented by coercive power. However, the advantage of being restrained to regularity in such circumstances, appears a more distinct and simple idea, than the universal importance of maintaining civil order in society.

Government is the only natural defence of public order: The design of its institution confines it to consult the general welfare. But the need it has of great power to enforce the execution of its decrees, proves evidently, that it is the enemy of many, while it acts in the name of all.

It is then a mere illusion, to hope that morality may be founded on the connection between public and private interest; or to imagine that the empire of the social laws can subsist without the support of Religion. The authority of these laws can have no decisive influence, on persons who were never interested in their establishment. Although the most remote origin should be ascribed to the hereditary distinction of property; yet it is certain, that those succeeding inhabitants
of

of the earth who are indigent, being struck with the unequal division of its rich domains, and not perceiving any boundary or lines of separation traced by nature, would have just cause of complaint. They would be entitled to say, ‘ All these
 ‘ compacts and partitions, this diversity of lots,
 ‘ which procure to some abundance and repose,
 ‘ to others labour and poverty ; indeed the whole
 ‘ of these laws are only advantageous to a few
 ‘ privileged persons : We cannot therefore submit to them, unless compelled by the fear of
 ‘ personal danger. Of what avail then,’ would they ask, ‘ are those ideas of justice and injustice,
 ‘ of which we hear so much ? What import
 ‘ those dissertations on the necessity of adopting
 ‘ certain regulations for the order of the society ?
 ‘ Our minds cannot assent to principles, which
 ‘ though general in theory, become particular in
 ‘ their application. We have the prospect of retri-
 ‘ bution and reward, while the principles of vir-
 ‘ tue, of submission and forbearance, are connect-
 ‘ ed with religious sentiments,—while we be-
 ‘ lieve ourselves accountable to that Supreme
 ‘ Being, whose will and whose laws we adore ;
 ‘ from whom we have received all things ;
 ‘ and whose approbation is offered to us as a
 ‘ motive of emulation, and an object of recom-
 ‘ pence : But if the contracted period of our
 ‘ life, should limit our whole concerns and inte-
 ‘ rests within its narrow compass, and should be
 ‘ the

‘ the boundary of all our views and our hopes,
 ‘ What respect could be due to those whom na-
 ‘ ture has formed our equals,—men sprung from
 ‘ lifeless clay, like ourselves, destined there to
 ‘ return, to sink for ever, and mingle with us in
 ‘ the dust? The rich have surely invented the
 ‘ laws of justice, that they might be the more
 ‘ secure usurpers. Let them descend from their
 ‘ lofty situation ; let them place themselves on
 ‘ the same level with us ; or, at least, let them
 ‘ bestow on us a more equal share of fortune,
 ‘ and we shall then be enabled to perceive, that
 ‘ the laws of civil right are beneficial. Till
 ‘ then we shall have just reason to continue
 ‘ enemies to those laws which we find so disad-
 ‘ vantageous. Besides, we cannot comprehend
 ‘ how it is in the name of our own interest, that
 ‘ we are required to renounce the desire of shar-
 ‘ ing in that abundance which surrounds us.’

Such is the secret language which all men
 must hold, who are oppressed by the hardships
 of their lot ; or even those who, in their habitu-
 al state of inferiority, feel themselves continually
 hurt by the sight of luxury and magnificence,

It would be difficult to combat these argu-
 ments, by endeavouring to depict in strong co-
 lours, the vanity of all pleasures, the deceitful-
 ness of the greater part of those objects which
 excite our ambition, and the languors which
 follow in their train. These reflections have
 doubtless

doubtless some weight and efficacy : But if we attentively consider the subject, whatever deserves the name of consolation in this world, can be successfully addressed only to souls that are prepared to receive it by ideas, more or less distinct, of religion and piety. For we cannot remove the obdurate and sullen dejection of the unhappy and envious wretch, who has totally rejected all hopes of futurity : Rivetted entirely to the concerns of a life, which is for him eternity and the universe itself, he becomes a slave to the immediate impulse of his passions, from which it is impossible to disengage him. He can lay hold of no idea, however vague, on which he can found his hope ; nor can he find any source of satisfaction. As reason itself requires the continual aid of the imagination, he can neither receive comfort from the condolence of his friends, nor from his own reflections.

Again, it may be maintained, that the distribution of happiness and misery is, in general, more equal than we commonly imagine. It might also be demonstrated in a rational manner, that labour is preferable to indolence ; and it might be pronounced with truth, that trouble and anxiety are often the concomitants of riches, while contentment of mind seems to accompany mediocrity of fortune. It must be acknowledged, at the same time, that these axioms can only
appear

appear just in the eye of the moralist, who considers man in a comprehensive point of view, and reckons on a general prospect of his whole life. Amidst the ordinary course of our desires and hopes, it is in vain that we attempt to excite exertion and industry by the expectation of riches, while we, at the same time, condemn those riches, by undervaluing the pleasures and advantages which they procure. Such subtle ideas, without exception, can never be applicable to real circumstances. If deep reasonings be, on some occasions, employed with effect, to alleviate our regrets, their success must depend on their being only opposed by shadows.

In short, were all the ordinary observations on the deceitfulness and illusions of riches and superiority converted into precepts, yet would they not prevent uncultivated minds from being struck by the evident inequality of condition, which appears between the rich and the poor. Here one would be apt to conclude, that one part of mankind have been made for the convenience of the other. The poor man employs his strength and his time, to heap upon the opulent all the enjoyments of life; while the rich man, by giving in exchange a scanty subsistence, deprives himself of nothing, since the extent of his real wants is limited by the laws of nature. The equality can then only be established by the lassitude and apathy which
proceeds

proceeds from the very enjoyment of pleasures. But these disgusts compose only the back ground in the picture of life. The common people do not perceive them ; for never having known any thing but want, they can form no idea of the languors which succeed our various satieties.

Shall it then be rashly concluded, since these distinctions of property obstruct the establishment of political morality, that we should endeavour to abolish them ? But even in those remote ages, when the degrees of mens ability and knowledge were incomparably more on a level, mankind could neither preserve a community of property, nor an equality in its distribution : How can it then be imagined, that those primitive connections can be re-established, at a period when the disparity of riches is so immensely increased, and at a time when the superiority of rank and power is confirmed by the immoveable strength of disciplined armies ?

Let us however suppose, that in the composition of an imaginary world, an exact division should be made of the possessions most esteemed by mankind. Even in this case, in order to maintain a true system of equality, it would be absolutely necessary, that every one should faithfully perform the duties imposed on him by the universal rules of morality ; because that is incumbent on each individual, in return for the sacrifice made by the whole members of the society ;

society; and each private citizen must be compensated by the community, for those losses and inconveniencies to which he subjects himself.

It is also essential to observe, that it is not only the true personal interest, as discerned by an enlightened mind, that must be connected with the public order, but also the private interest, as perverted by the passions; and then a mere guide will not suffice: Some yoke must be imposed,—some constant check must be absolutely employed. Indeed nothing can be more chimerical than to pretend, that a man, hurried on by an impetuous imagination, can be restrained, by endeavouring to recal to his remembrance, some principles and instructions, which, in the terms of the academic thesis, ought to be the *result of analysis, of methodizing, of the art of dividing, defining, developing and circumscribing our ideas**.

It would then be a bold undertaking indeed, to attempt to conduct all mankind by reason alone, since the first thing which reason discovers is its own weakness. But when it is necessary to found on maxims which may be controverted,—when the strong motive of personal interest must be opposed to a moral consideration, which can have no influence but by the help of profound

* THESIS of the French Academy, when a prize was proposed for the best Catechism of Morals the instructions of which should be founded on the Principles of Natural Right alone.

profound reflection, we call to mind the conduct of certain early economists, who, after establishing extravagant principles on the monopolizing of grain, thought it unnecessary to take any measures for preventing or suppressing popular commotions, till they should actually happen.

I think that our false reasonings on the union of the personal and public interest, proceed from applying to the present state of society, those principles on which it was originally founded. Our confounding these principles, though very natural, is the source of a multitude of errors. Let us endeavour to make this proposition plain, which at first seems difficult to be comprehended.—With this view, let us fancy for a moment, the spirits of the future generation assembled in an imaginary world. Let them be supposed ignorant, before their arrival on the earth, what individuals shall be born of parents loaded with the gifts of fortune, and what others shall be beset by misery from their cradle. Let them, however, be made acquainted with the principles and laws of civil right, and let the confusion be represented, which would be the inevitable consequence of a perpetual fluctuation in the division of property. Those individuals who are to compose the new generation, being equally uncertain of the lot reserved for each by the accident of birth, will, no doubt, unanimously assent to the events which await them: And, at this instant,

instant, while the connections of society have only a speculative existence, the private interest may, with justice, be said to be united to that of the public. But this unity immediately ceases, when each individual being arrived on the earth, takes possession of his lot. It is then no longer possible, that all the private interests should concur to maintain those vast gradations of rank and fortune which proceed from the chance of birth. And the multitude, to whose share nothing has fallen but troubles and want, can only become resigned to the inferiority of their condition, by principles of religion,—those sublime sentiments, which alone can point out to them an eternal justice, and place them, in imagination, before time, and before the laws.

Nothing is easier than to establish conditions, and enforce the observance of rules, at the instant when a lottery is to be drawn. The adventurers, having the same object in view, think all fair, just and proper, and peace reigns by common agreement: But as soon as the blanks and prizes are known, their minds change, their tempers grow sour; and without the restraint of authority, they would become unmanageable, envious, quarrelsome, and sometimes unjust and violent.

We now see, in consequence of what has been said, that a political Society in contemplation, and in reality, offers to our view two very different

ferent periods. These periods not being separated by any apparent limits, are almost always confounded in the mind of the political moralist. He who believes in the union of private interest with that of the public, and who celebrates that harmony, views only the general and original plan of Society; he who, on the other hand, thinks every thing amiss and discordant, because there are great differences of power and fortune among men, has considered Society only under its actual vicissitudes. Both these mistakes have been adopted by celebrated writers. We might expect that a man* hurried on by a lively imagination, and strongly impressed by present objects, would attend to nothing but the inequality of conditions in Society; while the Philosopher †, who, transported by his abstractions beyond the circle of human society, perceives only the principles which have regulated the first formation of civil laws. Thus, in most cases, disputes depend on placing the subject in different positions and in various lights. In the moral world there are so many stations, that the picture entirely changes, according to the point of view which we choose.

C

HITHERTO

* The translator supposes that the Author here alludes to ROUSSEAU.

† Perhaps MONTESQUIEU.

34 ON THE IMPORTANCE OF

HITHERTO we have endeavoured to investigate the effect which might be expected from a system of morality, the instructions of which are addressed to those who have the most enlightened views of private interest: It now remains to show, that no plan of education which requires time and reflection, can be adapted to the most numerous class of mankind. To be convinced of this fact, we need only turn our attention to the condition of those who are destitute of property, and void of talents to supply its place. Obligated to have recourse to hard labour, where the exertion of natural strength is alone requisite,—their own consent, and the power of the opulent, reduce the wages of this numerous class, to what is barely equal to the necessaries of life. They cannot without difficulty support their children; and they are so impatient to employ them in some profitable occupation, that it is impossible they should be sent to public schools, except during their early infancy. Thus ignorance and poverty are in the midst of our societies, and the hereditary lot of the greater part of mankind. There is no relaxation of this general law, except in those countries where Government encourages the high price of labour, and thus affords the people some means of resisting the despotism of fortune. Such being the inevitable effect of our civil and political legislation, How can we hope to prevail with all men, without distinction, to agree

agree in maintaining public order, by instructions, not merely complicated, but which require those to whom they are addressed, to proceed through a tedious train of previous reasoning, in order to comprehend them. It would not then be sufficient to bestow salaries on instructors, it would be also requisite to pay the scholars for their time ; since, for the lower class, even very early in life, time is the only means of subsistence.

Morality is not, like other human sciences, a species of knowledge which we are free to acquire at our leisure. The earliest instruction is still too late, since man has a natural power to do mischief, before his mind becomes capable of reflection, or of connecting the most simple ideas.

A political catechism would not then be proper for the instruction of the people ; nor could a series of precepts founded on the union of public and private interest be accommodated to their understanding. Though such a doctrine were to appear as just, as it seems to me liable to be disputed, its principles can never be rendered sufficiently simple and distinct, to make a proper impression on those whose education continues for so short a time. Morality, founded on Religion, makes its way so directly to the human heart, as to be perfectly suited to the particular situation of each individual. So hap-

pily is it adapted to this purpose that it would seem to be destined for it by one of those great Laws which regulate the order of the universe. Religion alone has power to persuade with celerity, because it excites our feelings, whilst it informs the understanding; because it alone is capable of rendering obvious what it recommends; in short, because it speaks in the name of God; and it is easy to inspire respect for Him whose power is every where evident to the eyes of the simple and the skilful, of children and men advanced to maturity.

In order to controvert this truth, let it not be alleged, that the idea of a God is of all others the most incomprehensible; and that if useful instructions may be derived from a principle so metaphysical, a much greater effect may be expected from precepts which are founded on the common relations of life. Such an objection is a mere subtilty. The distinct knowledge of the essence of a God, the Creator of the world, is, no doubt, above the comprehension of men, of every age and of all faculties: This, however, is not the case, with the general idea of a heavenly Power, who punishes and who rewards. Parental authority, and the helplessness of infancy, prepare us early for ideas of obedience and command: And the world is such a stupendous wonder, a theatre of such continual prodigies, that it is easy to annex, at an early period,

hope

hope and fear to the conception of a Supreme Being. The infinity of a God, Creator and Director of the universe, is then so far from tending to divert our respect and adoration, that the obscurity with which He is enveloped lends a new force to religious sentiments. A man often remains cool and unconcerned amidst the discoveries of his reason; but his passions are readily affected by the power of imagination: For this faculty of our soul excites us to continual activity, by presenting to the mind an unbounded prospect, and by keeping us always at a certain distance from our purpose. Man is naturally disposed to revere a power of which he cannot trace the origin. This innate disposition obliges us carefully to guard children in their education, against the insinuation of the various imaginary terrors of which they are susceptible. Thus, not only the true idea of an All-powerful God, but the mere credulous faith in superstitious opinions, will always have more influence on the inferior class of men, than abstract precepts, or general considerations. I believe it might even be said, with truth, that the future of this short life, when we contemplate it, appears more distant than the sublime perspective offered to the mind by Religion: Because that grand prospect deeply interests our feelings,—and the minutest description of reason can never equal in power, the impulsive ardour of the emotions of the heart.

I resume the train of my reflections; and will here offer an important remark: That the more the increase of taxes keeps the people in despondency and misery, it becomes the more indispensable to give them a religious education: For, while we are irritated by adversity, we have most need of a powerful restraint and of daily consolations. Successive abuses of strength and authority, by overturning all the relations which originally existed among men, have raised an artificial and disproportioned structure. Thus the idea of a God is become more necessary than ever, in order to level this confused assemblage of disparities. Were we even to imagine, that a people should exist, subject only to the laws of political morality, we should certainly represent a rising nation, restrained by the prime vigour of patriotic virtue,—a nation in which riches had not yet been accumulated,—where the distance of the habitations from each other, contributed to maintain the order of families,—where agriculture, that simple and peaceable occupation, would be the favourite employment,—where the work of the hands would obtain a recompence proportioned to the scarcity of the workmen, and the extensive usefulness of the labour; we should, in short, represent a nation where the laws and form of Government, would, for a long time, favour equality of rank and property. But in our ancient kingdoms of Europe, those
old

old political bodies, where men are crowded together, the increase of riches continually augments the difference of fortunes, and the distance of conditions,—and misery and magnificence are constantly mingled. It must, therefore, be a morality fortified by Religion, that shall restrain these numerous spectators of so much riches, and so many objects of envy,—who see, within their reach, all that they fancy necessary to happiness, yet must never hope to obtain it.

It may, perhaps, be asked, in consequence of these reflections, Whether Religion, which strengthens every tie, and fortifies every obligation, is not favourable to tyranny? Such a conclusion would be absurd. However, Religion, which comforts us under all afflictions, would also soothe the ills which arise from despotism; but it is neither the origin nor the support of it. Religion, well understood, would only give its sanction to order and justice: And the instructions of political morality have the same end in view. Thus, in both plans of education, the rights of the Sovereign, as well as those of the Citizens, constitute simply one of the elementary parts of the general system of our duties.

I shall only further remark, that the insufficiency of political morality would appear still more obvious in a nation, subject to an arbitrary prince, where the people would have no share in the Government: For the personal and public

blic interests, not being habitually connected, it were to be feared, that by holding out the union of these two interests as the essential motive of virtue, the greater number of disciples would only retain this part of the precept, That a regard to private interest was admitted for the first principle. Every one would, consequently, assume to himself the right of judging of the times and circumstances when selfishness and patriotism are to be separated, and when they are to be united. What a source of errors might not this become? Public good, like other abstract ideas, cannot be precisely defined. To the greater part of mankind, it appears a sea without bounds; and it requires not much address or subtilty to confound all our analogies. One may judge how we might model, according to our taste, the alliance of all the moral sentiments, by considering with what facility men find the means of reconciling with some good quality, the habitual faults of their character. He who wounds without discretion, values himself on his frankness and courage: He who is cowardly and timid in his words and sentiments, boasts of his caution and circumspection; and by a new refinement, of which I have seen some singular instances, he who asks of his Sovereign pecuniary favours, endeavours to persuade him that he is impelled to this solicitation, only by a noble desire of honourable distinction. Every one is ingenious in discovering
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the point of union which connects his passions with some virtue: Would they then be less expert in finding out some conformity between their own interest and that of the public?

I confess, I cannot, without a degree of disgust and horror, figure to myself a political society, whereof the members, without any governing principle, are only restrained by the pretended connection of their private interest with the general good. What partial judges! What multiplicity of opinions, sentiments and wills! All would be in confusion, if men were left at liberty to draw their own conclusions. They must absolutely have one simple idea for the rule of their conduct, especially when the application of this rule may be infinitely diversified. When God delivered his laws from Mount Sinai, he needed only to say, '*Thou shalt not steal*': And with the tremendous idea of that God, whom all nature calls to our mind, whom every thing impresses on the human heart, this short commandment preserves at all times a sufficient authority: But when political Philosophy says, '*Thou shalt not steal*', it ought to add to this precept a train of reasoning on the laws of right, on the inequality of conditions, and on the various social relations; and to persuade us, it ought to recount every motive, obviate every objection, and repel all attacks. It would even be necessary, that by the lessons of this Philosophy

sophy, the most uncultivated minds should be qualified to follow the various ramifications which unite, disjoin, and reunite, afresh, the public to the private interest. What an enterprise! It is perhaps somewhat like attempting to employ a course of anatomy, in order to direct a child in the choice of proper aliments, instead of beginning to conduct it by the counsels and authority of its mother.

The same remarks are applicable to all the virtues, of which the observance is essential to public order. What a task would it be to persuade a gallant, by reasoning alone, that he ought not to deprive a husband of the affections of his wife? Where would you assign him a distinct recompence for the sacrifice of his passion? What elaborate arguments would be requisite, in demonstrating to an ambitious man that he ought not, in secret, to calumniate his rival,—to the solitary miser, armed with indifference, that he ought not so anxiously to avoid every opportunity of doing good,—to a man of an ardent and vindictive temper, that he ought not to yield to the impulse of his passions,—to a needy man that he ought not to have recourse to falsehood and deceit, to better his condition? And how many other positions would offer the same or still greater difficulties? Abstract ideas, however well arranged, can only convince us by the longest method, since the peculiar nature

ture of these ideas is to disengage our reasoning from sensible objects, and consequently from striking and sudden impressions. Besides, political morality, like every thing which proceeds from the mind alone, would be considered by us as a mere matter of opinion : An opinion from which we should have right to appeal, at any time, to the tribunal of our reason. The lessons of men are only representations of their judgment ; and the opinions of some, influence not the will of others. There is no principle of morality, which relates only to what is absolutely human, that would not be susceptible of some exception or modification : And there is nothing more complicated than the idea of the connection between virtue and happiness. In short, while the mind cannot, without difficulty, comprehend the nature of that connection, the objects of our passions are every where apparent, and all our senses are pre-engaged by them. The miser beholds gold and silver : The ambitious man those honours which are conferred on others : The debauchee, the objects of his luxury : Virtue has nothing left but reasoning ; and ought, therefore, to be supported by religious sentiments, and by the pleasing hopes which accompany them.

In a government then, in which political morality was substituted for a religious education, it would become indispensably necessary to exclude

clude men from all information calculated to exalt their minds: It would be requisite to divert their attention from the various competitions which excite self-love and ambition: They must withdraw themselves from the society of women: And it would be incumbent on them to abolish the use of money, that alluring and universal representative of all our gratifications. In short, by depriving men of religious hopes, and all those motives to virtue which the imagination presents, every exertion must be used to prevent that unguarded imagination from promoting vice, and encouraging all the passions contrary to public order. It was because Telemachus was accompanied by a Divinity, that he could safely visit the sumptuous court of Sesostris, and the enchanting abodes of Eucharis and Calypso.

In the gay, thoughtless, and headstrong period of youth, the authority of a guide is peculiarly necessary. In order, then, to pass with safety through that season of security and danger, we need *principles* which may command, not merely *reflections* to counsel us; these can only have influence in proportion to the vigour of the understanding; and the understanding cannot be formed without experience and a long conflict of opinions.

Religious instructions have the peculiar advantage of interesting our imagination and our feelings

feelings, to the influence of which we are particularly subject in our early years. Thus though we could establish a course of political morality, sufficiently supported by reason, for defending men advanced to maturity from vice, I should still say that such a philosophy would not be suitable to youth, for whom this armour would be too heavy.

In short, the lessons of human wisdom, which cannot govern us during the ardour of our passions, are equally insufficient when we are exhausted by disease, and no longer able to comprehend a variety of relations: But, so pleasing are the emotions which the voice of Religion excites, that in the gradual decline of our faculties, we can still listen to it.

If we were persuaded, however, that there was on earth a more certain encouragement to virtue than religious sentiments, their powers would be immediately weakened; they can neither interest us nor govern us in a partial manner; and if they did not, as we may say, overflow the human heart, all their influence would vanish.

Religious instruction, while it assembles all the means proper to excite men to virtue, neglects not, it is true, to point out the connection that subsists between the observance of the laws of morality and the happiness of life; but these considerations are only presented as accessory motives

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tives, and it is not necessary to support them by such strong proofs as a fundamental principle requires. Besides, when people are early taught, that vices and crimes lead to misery on earth, these doctrines can only make a lasting impression, in so far as we are able to convince them of the constant influence of a Providence, over all the events of this world.

It is by no means incumbent on religious instructors to demonstrate, that all the advantages which men so eagerly pursue, are always the immediate consequences of observing the laws of order ; for this important reason, That acts of self-denial, supported by an idea of duty, are changed into real pleasures. The inward feelings, indeed, which the virtuous enjoy from piety, compose an essential part of their happiness. But what consolatory reflection can a man have in his own breast, what self-approbation can be afforded him, when he knows no other authority than that of political morality, and when virtue is only a coincidence of the private with the public interest ?

The object and ultimate end of Religion is certainly the happiness of mankind. This happiness being placed at a distance, Religion conducts us to it by salutary restrictions and temporary sacrifices. It is conversant only with the most sublime part of our existence, that which detaches us from the present moment to connect us with futurity. It offers us hopes, which sufficiently

ficiently disengage us from our worldly concerns, to prevent us from yielding implicitly to inordinate desires, and to the tyranny of our passions. Irreligion, on the contrary, whose lessons teach us that we are only masters of the present moment, contracts us still more within ourselves; and there is nothing either good or agreeable in such a condition: For greatness of every kind, depends on the extent of those relations which we comprehend; and, in this respect, our feelings and intellect are subjected to the same laws.

Those who would represent religious obligations as a matter of indifference, assure us that we may safely repose the maintenance of morality on some general sentiments which we have adopted. They do not, however, consider, that these sentiments derive almost all their force and weight from that spirit of religion which they desire to weaken. Yes, even humanity, that endearing emotion of a noble soul, is animated and fortified by the idea of a Supreme Being. The alliance between men depends but little on conformity of structure and organization; nor can it be attributed to the similitude of their passions,—that continual source of so much hatred: It depends essentially on our connection with the same Author, the same Superintendent, the same Judge. It is founded on the equality of our right to the same hopes, and on that train of duties inculcated

inculcated by education, and rendered respectable by the habitual dominion of religious opinions. It must, alas! be confessed, that men are so faulty, so unjust, selfish and ungrateful, in the eyes of those who have observed them collectively, that we never can maintain harmony amongst them by the mere lessons of human wisdom. We do not always relish such instruction because it is amiable, but very often, only because we are conscious, that it merits our esteem. Yes, even goodness and forbearance, those simple qualities, still need to be adjusted, from time to time, with a general and predominant idea, which is the band of all our virtues. We are so much hurt, in various ways, by the passions of others, and our self-love is often so strong and so deeply rooted, that we have need of some succour, to enable us, at all times, to maintain generous sentiments, and a true concern for the welfare of our fellow mortals.

In short, it must be confessed, that if a man shall once come to consider himself as a being that is the child of chance, or of blind necessity, and tending only to the dust from whence he sprung, he must necessarily despise himself. Far from aspiring at elevated and virtuous sentiments, he would consider this sort of ambition as a fantastic idea, which consumes in a vain, illusory manner, a part of those fleeting minutes which he has to pass on earth : And all his attention
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being fixed on the shortness of life, and on the eternal silence which must close the scene, he would only think *how to devour this reign of a moment.*

How dangerous then would it be, to show mankind the extremity of the chain which unites them together ! By knowing the ultimate boundary of their expectations, men become ungrateful towards those from whom they no longer expect any thing ; and the same sentiment would weaken the power of morality, if our lease of existence were manifestly only for this world. Religion, then, alone can strengthen those ties, and defend the entire system of our moral duty, against the stratagems of reasoning, and the subtilities of wit. To oblige mankind to consider the laws of morality with due respect, they must be early taught that the social virtues are an homage rendered to the perfections and to the beneficent intentions of the Sovereign Author of Nature,—that Infinite Being, who is pleased with the preservation of order, and with the private sacrifices which the accomplishment of this grand design requires. But when I see modern Philosophers trace, with an able hand, the general plan of our duties,—when I see them determine with accuracy the reciprocal obligations of citizens,—and when, at last, they give for the basis of this legislation, self-interest and the love of praise, I recollect the system of those Indian
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Philosophers, who having studied the revolutions of the heavenly Bodies, and being at a loss to determine what power sustained the vaulted firmament, thought they had obviated the difficulty, by placing the universe on the back of an Elephant, and this Elephant on the back of a Tortoise. We shall imitate these philosophers, and like them, proceed only by degradation, if we ever attempt to form a chain of duties and moral principles, of which the ultimate link is not placed above worldly considerations, and beyond the limits of our social conventions.



C H A P. II.

The same Subject continued. A parallel between the influence of Religious Principles, and the effect of Laws and Opinions.

HAVING examined, in the preceding chapter, whether it were possible to found morality on the connection of the private with the public interest, we come now to consider, whether the punishments inflicted by the Sovereign, and the sway of public opinion, have sufficient power to restrain mankind, and attach them to the observance of their duty.

We should proceed by common ideas, that we may advance gradually in the investigation of the truth : We ought then, first to recollect here, That the penal laws can only be applied to such offences as are known and proved. This single consideration contracts their power within very narrow limits. But it is not merely crimes secretly committed, which are beyond the cognizance of the law ; we must also place in this rank, every reprehensible action, which, having no precise character, can admit of no distinct definition. Of these there are a prodigious num-

ber : The rigour of parents, and the ingratitude of children; the cruel neglect of servants; treachery in friendship; the violation of domestic comfort; disunion sown in the bosom of families; levity of principles in every social connection; perfidious counsels; artful and slanderous insinuations; rigorous exercise of authority; favour and partiality of judges,—their inattention, negligence and severity; endeavours to obtain places of importance with a consciousness of incapacity; corrupt and feigned adulation offered to princes or ministers; the indifference of statesmen to the public good,—their mean and pernicious jealousies, and those political dissensions which they excite, with a view to encrease their own importance; wars instigated by ambition; intolerance under the false shew of zeal: And in short, many other fatal evils which the law can neither follow nor describe, and which may be productive of the greatest mischiefs, before they become liable to public censure. We cannot indeed wish that this censure should pass certain bounds, because authority when applied to obscure faults, or to such as may be susceptible of various interpretations, easily degenerates into tyranny. And as there is nothing so subtil as thought, nothing so secret as our sentiments, no other than an invisible power, whose authority seems to partake of the divine influence, has a right to enter into the secrets of our hearts.

A man can only be interrogated at the tribunal of his own conscience, with regard to many actions and intentions which escape the vigilance of Government. Let us beware of abolishing the authority of this active and upright judge ; let us beware of weakening it voluntarily, by imprudently trusting all to social discipline alone. The power of conscience is, I will venture to say, more necessary in the present age, than at any preceding period. Though society no longer presents to our view those vices and crimes which shock us by their deformity ; yet licentiousness of morals, and refinement of manners, have, often by imperceptible shades, so nearly approximated good and evil, vice and decency, falsehood and truth, selfishness and affected generosity, that it is become more important than ever to oppose this hidden depravity by an interior authority,—a power which may pry into the mysterious intricacies of disguise, and whose action may be as penetrating as our dissimulation seems artful and well concerted.

A similar authority, appears to be absolutely necessary for the maintenance of public order ; and it is, undoubtedly, for this reason, that several philosophic writers have assumed a like principle amidst their Atheism. In such a system all is wild theory. They talk of our blushing at the recollection of our follies, of dreading our own secret reproaches, and of fearing the

condemnation, which, on calm reflection, we shall pronounce against ourselves. Those sentiments, so powerful, when accompanied with the belief of a God, can be referred to no certain principles, when we take interest for our sole guide, and abolish all the important connections that are maintained among men by religious opinions; *conscience* must then become a term without meaning, a word of no import in the language. We may indeed feel remorse, that is to say regret, at being deceived in our pursuits of ambition,—in the promotion of our interest,—in the choice of means employed to obtain the respect and praise of others; or, in short, in the various plans we form for our worldly advantage: But such remorse is only an exaltation of our self-love. We deify, as it were, our judgment and understanding, and we, at last, make all our actions appear before these false idols, to reproach us with our errors and weaknesses. We thus voluntarily torment ourselves; but when this persecution too long importunes us, we have it in our power to command our tyrants to be more indulgent. The case is very different with the reproaches of conscience. The sentiments which produce them are neither compounded nor artificial. We cannot corrupt our judge, nor enter into any compromise with him; and those things which seduce mankind can
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never deceive him. Even in the giddiness of prosperity, and amidst the intoxication of the greatest success, his looks are inevitably fixed on us, and we cannot without terror enjoy the applause and the triumphs we have not merited.

Several modern writers have laid it down as a maxim, That with good laws we should always have morality sufficient ; but I cannot adopt this opinion. Man is a being so compounded and his relations with his species are so various and subtil, that to regulate his mind, and direct his conduct, he needs a multitude of sentiments on which the commands of the Sovereign can have no influence. Simple and declared duties only, have been reduced to precepts by the legislators ; and there are innumerable vacancies in that rough pile, termed *civil laws*. The laws demand merely an implicit obedience : And as they enjoin or prohibit actions alone, being absolutely indifferent to the private sentiments of men, the moral structure which they raise, is, in many parts, a mere exterior form ; and they seem to have begun, if I may so speak, at the top of the edifice. Religion proceeds in a direct contrary manner. It is in the heart,—in the deep recesses of conscience, that she places the first base. She seems to possess the grand secret of nature : She sows in the earth a seed, which is there nourished, encreased and transformed into numerous branches ; and these, without any effort,

spring up and extend themselves to all dimensions, and in various forms.

Let us suppose, however, that it were sufficient for the maintenance of public order, to reduce morality to the spirit of the civil laws ; yet it would not be in the power of man to deduce from this assimilation, familiar instructions proper to form a code of education : For these laws, though simple in their commands, are not so in their principles. We perceive not, at first view, why the most just revenge should be prohibited ; why we have not the power to enforce the restitution of our property, by the same means the plunderer has used in seizing it ; why we have not right to resist with violence the tyrannic oppressor ; in short, why certain actions, some indifferent in themselves, and some hurtful to others, are condemned in a general and uniform manner. Some comprehension indeed is necessary, to discover that the legislator has departed from our natural ideas, in order that every person might not become a judge in his own cause, and to prevent each individual member of society from determining by his own judgment, those exceptions and distinctions of which every circumstance is susceptible. In the same manner, from motives not at first obvious, the laws treat with more rigour an offence which cannot be easily detected, than a crime more reprehensible in itself, but of which the enormity

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is more palpable. The laws observe the same rule with regard to crimes proceeding from the greatest incitements, though our yielding to these, might appear a palliative circumstance in the view of simple justice. In short, the laws, by adopting a determinate method of constraining debtors to discharge their obligations, prove that they are not compassionate to unforeseen misfortunes, nor actuated by other motives of equity which merit equal consideration. All their attention is fixed on the connection which engagements have with those political resources that arise from commerce and its transactions. Thus, there exists a multitude of prohibitions, of penalties and gradations of punishments, which depend only on the general views of legislation, and agree not with the circumscribed good sense which determines the judgment of individuals. It is then often from very extensive and complicated considerations, that actions are judged reprehensible in the eye of law. It is impossible, therefore, to erect on this base alone, a system of morality, of which every one can have a clear perception. And since the Legislator carefully avoids submitting any thing to the determination of individuals, and often sacrifices natural justice to this principle, How then can he wish, at the same time, to give us for a rule of conduct a political morality altogether founded on reasoning?

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We may further observe, that to the greater number of men, the sense of the laws and the decrees formed by those who interpret them, must necessarily appear to be blended, and united, so as to form only one object: And, as the judges are frequently liable to error, the true spirit of legislation remains often in obscurity, and cannot be discerned without difficulty.

The laws being the work of our understanding, we are, on that account, perhaps, disposed to grant them a universal dominion. But I confess, I am so far from thinking that they can ever be substituted instead of the salutary influence of religion, that I believe them inadequate to regulate those things which are immediately subjected to their authority. Thus we should consider, if the unhappy errors with which we reproach criminal tribunals, do not originate from the faults committed by sovereign authority; while it has referred all the duties of the judges to the injunctions of the law, and while it has refused further to confide in the conscience and private sentiments of the Magistrate.

Let us illustrate this observation by a single example, selected from many others. Suppose it were now required that the Legislator should, of new, decide the important question, with regard to the credit due to the evidence of witnesses:

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Will he not always be in hazard of error, whether he absolutely rejects such an indication of truth, or whether he makes the fate of a criminal depend upon it? How can he say, that the testimony of an honest man, describing or identifying the person of his affassin, should go for nothing with the judge? And how can he pretend, that a testimony of this kind is sufficient to determine a condemnation, when he who gives the evidence appears suspicious, from his bad reputation, from the motives which we may suppose to actuate him, or from the improbability of his assertion? The right course is then placed between these two extremes: But intermediate ideas are not consonant with the absolute language of law; we ought, therefore, in such circumstances to leave much to the wisdom and integrity of the magistrate. So far from serving innocence by acting otherwise, we visibly endanger it; for judges become habituated to account the law responsible for every thing; and, thus they implicitly obey the *letter*, instead of observing the *spirit* of it,—which is the anxious desire of obtaining truth. What! some may exclaim, Do you wish that there should be no positive instruction to serve as a guide in the examination of crimes, or to determine the character by which these crimes may be distinguished? I mean not to say so; but I could wish, in a matter so important, that there should be united to the instructions

structions which the prudence of the Legislator has given, those hints which the sagacity of the judges may afford,—I could wish that the criminal law had prescribed to magistrates, not all that they are obliged to do, but all that they ought not to omit doing,—not only all that is sufficient to determine their opinion, but also what ought to be the indispensable condition of a capital punishment. Tempered by such a spirit, the commands given by the law would be an excellent safeguard against the ignorance or possible prevarication of the judges. But as no general rule nor immutable principle is applicable to an infinite diversity of circumstances, I would give to innocence a new defence, by more immediately interesting the morality of the judges to search for and investigate the truth. To remind them continually of the whole extent of their obligations, I could wish, that previous to their passing a sentence of condemnation, raising one of their hands towards heaven, they should pronounce, in a solemn and earnest manner, these words, ‘ I attest that the man accused before us, appears to me guilty, both according to the rules of law, and according to my own private judgment.’ It is not sufficient that a judge should be required to examine with probity, if the proofs of an offence are conformable to those which the statute represents as the indication of truth ; a magistrate should also be advised,

vised, that he ought to inquire into the truth by all the means that scrupulous anxiety can suggest. He should know, that being called to decide on the life and honour of men, his understanding and his heart, ought to be enlisted, as it were, in the cause of humanity, and that there are no limits opposed to the extent of his duty : Then, without omitting any of the enquiries required by law, he would strive to proceed still further ; and without rejecting any evidence capable of making an impression on a reasonable man, he would, at the same time, allow none to have such decisive force, as to render the examination of circumstances unnecessary. Judges would then make use of that instinctive mode of discernment, which is often more quick-sighted and penetrating than any other. They would not then disdain to read even the looks of the accuser and accused ; and they would not think it a matter of indifference to observe with attention, all those emotions of nature, where truth is sometimes painted with so much energy. Then, in short, innocence, would be under the protection of something as pure as itself, the scrupulous decision of a judge's conscience.

Perhaps, we have never properly considered how much a precise methodical order, when too servilely followed, contracts the mind. It becomes then like a path traced between two banks, which prevents our discovering what is
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not in a straight line. The strict observance of method prevents us from consulting that internal illumination, sometimes so lively, of which the soul alone is the focus: For by subjecting us to a positive and regular procedure, and by making us delight in a determined path, which offers continual repose to our thoughts, it incapacitates us for exercising that delicate perception,—those natural sentiments, which have nothing fixed or circumscribed, but whose unrestrained efforts often make us approach to truth, as by a kind of instinctive inspiration.

It would be deviating too far from the matter in hand, were I to extend these reflections further; and I hasten to connect them with the subject of this Chapter, by repeating again, That since the laws are insufficient, even in the cases submitted to their authority, and since they have absolute need of the aid of religious morality, whenever they impose on their expounders duties that are a little complicated, they would be still less able to supply the habitual influence of that motive, the most powerful of all, whose action alone, is sufficiently penetrating to follow us in the mazes of our conduct, and in the labyrinth of our thoughts.

I come now to mention other considerations. All that is required by public order, all that is of importance to society, some will say is, that criminals may not escape from the sword of justice;

justice; and that an attentive superintendence may detect them, under whatever cover they seek to conceal themselves. I will not here repeat the various obstacles which are opposed to the plenitude of this vigilance; every one may easily form an idea of them: But I proceed to observe, That in considering the actual state of Society, we ought not to forget that religious sentiments have greatly diminished the task of government. An entire new scene would open, had we only for our guide a political morality. It would not then be a few men without principles who would disturb the public order; more able actors would mix in the throng. Some conducted by mature reflection, others hurried away by seducing appearances, would be incessantly at war with all those whose fortune excited their jealousy. Then indeed we should discover the many and various opportunities there are of doing evil and injuring others. All these enemies of public order, being unmolested by the reproaches of conscience, would daily become more expert in the art of eluding the pursuit of justice; and the dangers to which the imprudent exposed themselves would not discourage the more skilful.

It is then, if I may so speak, because the laws find men in a healthy constitution, and in a temperate state, prepared by religious instruction, that they can restrain them. But were a system
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of education merely political, ever to prevail, new precautions, and new restraints would become indispensably necessary. Thus we should be loosed from the mild ties of religion, to have our civil slavery encreased, and our necks bent under the hardest of all yokes, that which is imposed by our fellow creatures.

Religion, whose influence some wish us to reject, is better adapted than they imagine, to the strange mixture of pride and weakness which constitutes our nature: And for us, such as we are, its operation is far preferable to that of the penal laws. It is not before his equals, armed with the rod of vengeance, that the culprit is made to appear; neither is he abandoned to their ignorance, or inexorable justice; it is at the tribunal of his own conscience that Religion accuses him. She humbles him before God, the Sovereign of the world, and comforts him in the name of a tender and merciful Father. Alas! ye who wish to refer every thing to private interest and public punishment, How would you then deprive us both of our consolation and of our true dignity? But permit me to listen to those commands which come from on high: Let me turn my attention from the menacing sceptre which the potentates of the earth wield in their hand: Let me account to Him, who is greater than them all, and before whom they shrink to nothing. Let me, in short, address myself to
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Him who pardons, and who, at the moment I have offended, permits me still to love Him and rely on his forgiveness! Alas! without the idea of a God,—without this connection with a Supreme Being, the Author of Nature, we should only listen to the mean councils of selfish prudence; it would only be necessary to flatter and adore the rulers of nations, and all those who, in an absolute monarchy are the numerous representatives of the authority of the prince. Yes, talents, sentiments, all ought to bend before those dispensers of so much good and evil, if nothing exists beyond the present life: And when once all cringe and fall prostrate,—when there is no more dignity of character, men will become incapable of any great action, and unequal to any degree of moral excellence.

Religious opinions have the double merit of rendering us obedient to the laws prescribed by the Sovereign, and of cherishing in our hearts secret sentiments, which sustain our courage, and remind us of our true dignity. Such sentiments, by offering a prospect of an ultimate period, when all must return to equality before the great Ruler of the World, teach men to show submission without meanness, and to scorn an abject humiliation before their fellow mortals.

The idea of a God at the same distance from all men, serves also to console us for that painful sense of superiority of rank and fortune, which so

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constantly oppresses us. We must transport ourselves to those heights which Religion discovers to us, in order to consider with calmness and indifference the vain pretensions of some, and the confident haughtiness of others; and such objects of regret or jealousy as appeared a Colossus to our imagination, shrink to dust, when we contrast them with the grand prospects which such sublime meditations open to our view.

How blind, then, how indifferent to their true interest, are those who wish to substitute mere political and worldly maxims, instead of religious instructions! How obdurate and unfeeling are those too, who imagine they should be able to conduct men by terror alone; and who, contesting the salutary influence of religious opinions, expect less from them, than from the ax of the lictors, and the apparatus of execution! What shall we then think of this wretched system? For, if such a method of securing public tranquillity were even adequate to produce the effect, Why should we not prefer religious principles, which *prevent* crimes, to the rigours of law which *punish* them? Neither do I understand, how those who repel religious sentiments, with the same hand wish to raise scaffolds every where, and multiply, without scruple, those dreadful theatres of severity: For if men, while hurried on to crimes, were only governed by blind necessity, alas! what do they deserve?

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And if we determine that they should perish as examples, we should attend at their execution, as at an offering, like that of Iphigenia, who was sacrificed at Aulis for the salvation of Greece.

Religion possesses still another advantage over the laws. They are ever armed for vengeance; whilst Religion, on the contrary, even when threatening, offers us pardon and felicity. And I believe, contrary to the common opinion, That man, by his nature, is more constantly animated by hope than restrained by fear. Hope composes the tenor of our life, whilst fear is the effect of an extraordinary circumstance or a particular situation. In short, courage, or inconsiderateness, often makes us regardless of danger, whilst ideas of happiness are perpetually present, and are, as it were, blended with our whole existence.

Some may, however, say, We mean not to speak merely of the civil and penal laws, when we maintain that good public institutions might be substituted for the influence of religious opinions: It would be necessary to introduce laws of education, which might previously prepare the mind and form the character. But they have not explained, nor can I conjecture, what these laws are, that they wish to distinguish from the general doctrines with which we are conversant. These are undoubtedly susceptible of

different degrees of perfection ; however, before instructing us, not only in the simple and real virtues, but also in all those that are complicated and conventional, such doctrines necessarily become extremely vague, and cannot exist independent of the support afforded them by the fixed and precise principles of Religion. The example of Sparta may perhaps be cited, where the state undertook the education of the citizens, and by that means fitted them for those extraordinary manners which history has depicted : But that government, aided by all the influence of paternal authority, had only two great objects in view, the encouragement of a martial spirit, and the preservation of liberty. Little value was set on Morality, that system which is now become so interesting amongst us. It was there rendered the less necessary, as all their institutions tended to maintain a perfect equality of rank and fortune, and excluded every kind of communication with foreigners. In short, it was, after all, a religious principle which subjected the Spartans to the authority of their legislator ; and without their confidence in the Oracle of Delphos, Lycurgus had only been a celebrated Philosopher.

Our present circumstances are by no means such as to admit of our being governed by laws of education, supported solely by political principles. In order to make the experiment, we must

must be divided into little societies, and by some secret, yet undiscovered, be enable to oppose invincible obstacles to the enlargement of some and the destruction of others of these associations: We must renounce all those desires and gratifications which are the inevitable consequence of an increase of wealth, and the progress of the arts and sciences. In short, and the fact may appear somewhat strange, at a period when, amidst improvements of every kind, man is become a very compound moral being,—and when, in consequence of this modification of the human character produced by our living in society, there is more need than ever of some great principle which may reach the common spring of all the affections,—at this period, man is to be, all at once, reduced to his primitive simplicity! for, the influence of an education purely civil must otherwise be too narrow to produce any happy effects upon his character. It may be added, that as a political education could not be adapted to the people in general, we must, like the Spartans, divide them into two classes,—Citizens and Slaves. This observation leads us to an important reflection, That in a country where slavery was introduced, and where the most numerous class of the nation was governed by the constant fear of the severest chastisement, one might trust more to the bare influence of political morality: For this morality

having then only to regulate the class of society which consists of proprietors, the task would become far more limited : But among us, where fortunately all men, without distinction, are subjected only to the laws, such extensive regulations, necessarily require to be fortified and supported by an authority such as that of religious opinions, which may affect every rank and character.

I shall conclude my observations on this part of my subject by another important reflection. Supposing even that the influence of sovereign authority were sufficiently extensive to prevent or repress evil, still Religion would have the advantage, in one respect : It alone inculcates the beneficent virtues ; and in the present state of society, these virtues are indispensably necessary. It is not enough to be strictly just, while the laws of property reduce to bare necessities the most numerous class of men, and their scanty resources are dried up by the most trivial accident : I will venture to affirm, that such is the extreme inequality established by these laws, that the spirit of charity and benevolence constitutes an essential part of social order. That spirit is ever ready to relieve distress, and, by a thousand various ways, to communicate succour and comfort to those poor creatures who are sinking under the extremity of wretchedness. But were this spirit, the business of which is to
act

act as a mediator between the rigour of civil right and the original claims of humanity, ever to become extinct, we should see all the ties of subordination gradually relax. Were the man favoured with the gifts of fortune never to appear to the people in the character of a benefactor, they would more sensibly feel the great extent of his privileges, and consequently would become readier to question his right of superiority. A way must then be found of moderating the power of property, or otherwise we must pay due homage to that religious morality, which, by the sublime idea of an exchange between the blessings of heaven and earth, obliges the rich to give what the laws cannot demand.

Thus, Religion continually comes to the assistance of civil legislation; it speaks a language unknown to the laws; it excites that sensibility which ought to precede reason itself; it acts like light and natural heat,—it enlightens, animates and pervades all: And we should carefully remark, that in society these moral sentiments are the imperceptible tie of many parts, which seem to be connected by their peculiar relations, but would be successively detached, were this chain ever broken. This truth will be more fully illustrated in the following examination of the connection of opinion with morality.

WHEN it is proposed to subject men to the observance of public order, and inspire them with the love of virtue, by motives independent of Religion, those who undertake the task will doubtless employ two very powerful principles: The desire of Praise, and the fear of Shame. In order to follow my subject through all its branches, I must examine the different degrees of force these motives possess, and also how they can be applied. In another work, I have treated of Public Opinion, and its salutary effects; but my present subject obliges me to consider it under a different point of view. This I shall be enabled to accomplish, by placing myself, as it were, behind the scene of worldly affairs.

First then, I remark, that the public opinion exerts its influence in a very narrow compass, being principally exercised on such persons as are rendered conspicuous in the world by their rank or employment. The public opinion is an approbation or censure offered in name of the general interest: It can, therefore, be applied only to such matters as one way or other affect this interest. The private conduct of those who discharge the most important functions in society, is, no doubt, subjected to the judgment and superintendence of the public; and this is no way surprising, since, in such circumstances, the principles of an individual appear as an earnest or presage of his public virtues: But all those,
whose

whose sole occupation is to receive and spend their income, and those who are entirely devoted to dissipation, and have no connection with the important concerns of the community, become independent of the opinion of the world ; or at least they do not experience its severity, till, by foolish extravagance, or vain pretensions, their conduct becomes the object of public ridicule. In short, a great number of men, who, by their obscurity and mediocrity of fortune, are, as it were, lost in the crowd, will never dread a power that always selects its heroes and victims from those who are above the common rank. Thus, the solitary inhabitants of cottages, dispersed through the country, are as indifferent to public opinion, as those unhappy tribes, who labour at the bottom of mines, and pass their whole lives in a dark subterraneous cavern, are to the rays of the sun.

We can then form no comparison between the peculiar ascendancy of public opinion and the general influence of religious morality.

Fame can only reward certain rare and singular actions ; and, amongst a nation of heroes, or men in the state of perfection, it would have nothing to bestow. Religion has a continual tendency to render virtue common ; but the universal success of its instructions would derogate nothing from the value of its benefits.

Those

Those alone, who appear with splendour on the stage of life, can obtain the laurels which fame bestows. Religion, on the contrary, heaps its most distinguished favours on those who despise praise, and do good in secret.

The opinion of the world always requires that talents and knowledge should accompany virtue; and thus the love of praise becomes the source and motive of great actions. Religion imposes no such condition: Its rewards are offered to the ignorant as well as the learned, to the humble spirit as well as to the exalted genius. By animating all men equally, and exciting universal activity, it contributes effectually to the maintenance of civil order.

Fame, judging only of actions in their state of maturity, makes no account of our endeavours; and as the competitors behold not the palm, till the moment they approach the goal, every one must, at the commencement of the career, derive his courage and perseverance from his own strength alone. Religion, on the contrary, attends us, if I may so speak, from the moment we begin to think. She favourably receives our intentions, and accepts our mere willingness; she strengthens our resolutions and encourages our endeavours: And continually reminding us of proffered rewards, she influences us at all times and in all situations.

As

As fame can only confer rewards, of which the principal value depends on comparisons, contrasts and competitions, it frequently draws on its favourites the envenomed breath of slander; and then they have sometimes cause to doubt of the real value of its favours. Religion mingles no mortifications with its rewards. It affords happiness and contentment in obscurity; and as it has sufficient treasures for all the world, what is granted to some never impoverishes others.

The public opinion is sometimes mistaken in its determinations; because amidst the vast circle in which its tribunal is erected, it is often difficult to distinguish true merit and the splendour which follows it, from the false glare of hypocrisy. Religion extends its influence to the inmost recesses of the heart, and places there an observer, who has a closer view of men than their actions afford, and whom they cannot either deceive or surmise.

It must be confessed, that there are moments in which public opinion loses its influence, and becomes enervated, or is guided by a servile spirit: When it seeks to find faults in the oppressed, and attributes noble intentions to powerful men, that it may without shame abandon the one and celebrate the other: Ah! in such moments, with what delight do we return to the precepts of religious morality! Those independent principles, which, while they decide our opinions with
regard

regard to things deserving approbation or contempt, enable us to follow the dictates of our heart, and speak according to our conscience !

Thus, the opinion of the world, whose increasing influence I have beheld, though it unites so many motives to excite men to illustrious actions and exalted virtues, can never be compared with the universal, invariable influence of Religion, and those moral sentiments with which it inspires men of all ages, of all conditions, and of every degree of understanding.

Would it be deviating from my subject, to notice the illusion those are under, who expect some important advantage to result from the marks of distinction lately invented in France, under the name of Public rewards for virtue? These trivial favours of opinion can only be bestowed on a few singular actions ; and it might be feared, that were these institutions rendered permanent and general, they might turn the attention of the people from that grand recompense which ought to be the chief motive and spring of all that is great and virtuous. Experienced huntsmen, at the moment when all the hounds are pursuing the noblest inhabitant of the forest, would never permit the pack to turn aside and follow any prey that may start from a thicket.

The establishments here alluded to, have also the disadvantage of suggesting a degree of surprise

pride at the appearance of good actions; and thus, announcing too distinctly that they are thought rare, and above the ordinary powers of humanity. And were these institutions extended still farther, they would produce a mere spirit of parade, always ready to languish when applause was distant. It would indeed be a great misfortune, were such a spirit ever to take place of simple and modest integrity, which contains in itself its motives and reward. Virtue and vanity form but a bad alliance. In that case, men act only to be seen; and of the few opportunities they have of doing good, they always select the most conspicuous. There is, besides, a class of men, so ill treated by fortune, that it would be a great mistake to habituate them to expect rewards in this life for fulfilling their duty; as such expectations would be too often frustrated.

We cannot too frequently repeat, that a respect for morality must be maintained, by strengthening religious principles, which are its most solid foundation. All other extraneous motives derive their force from novelty; and before the period when society would actually need to have recourse to them, it would perhaps have arrived at the highest pitch of depravity.

I HAVE hitherto only considered the influence of opinion as it is discovered in a general and public

public manner. But men also privately manifest the idea they have conceived of each other as individuals. This sentiment, which takes then the simple name of *esteem*, depends on our certain knowledge of the moral character of those with whom we have an intimate correspondence. Esteem, in this view, has not the splendour of reputation ; but as every one can pretend to it in the circle where his birth and occupation have placed him, the hope of obtaining it ought to be reckoned among the principal motives which excite us to the observance of morality. However, were we to suppose this esteem to be entirely separated from religious sentiments, it would become like many other advantages, which every one prizes according to his own fancy ; for whatever is derived solely from men, can only have a value relative to our connection with them : Thus, though the regard of one, or of several persons, would sometimes compensate the loss of public approbation, yet even their esteem would often appear inferior to other objects of ambition. In short, from the moment every preference, every valuation was brought to a standard, each individual would insensibly adopt a particular book of rates ; and the accuracy of the appretiation would depend on his judgment and foresight. But can we imagine, that moral order would be secured, while morality depended on nice and arbitrary comparisons, whose foundations are continually

continually changing by the various circumstances and situations of life? The motives which Religion presents are of a very different kind. It is neither by confused contrasts, nor intricate calculations, that it directs men. It recalls their attention to their chief interest, and assembles them, as it were, around a beacon whose brilliant flames are seen on all sides. Indeed the rules which it prescribes are neither uncertain nor wavering, and the advantages which it promises admit of no equivalent.

It may be further observed, that a selfish spirit, after comparing the enjoyment of esteem with pleasures of a different kind, would not fail to reckon the chances which afford a hope of imposing on men; and amidst these perplexed calculations, the passion of the moment would be almost always victorious. Besides, we might ask, What is the esteem of others to that numerous class which poverty secludes from society? What effects can it produce on those who subsist so precariously, that they can never extend their views beyond to-day or to-morrow? The advantages annexed to reputation may be considered as so many promissory notes, which do not become really due till some distant term, for which the creditor must wait with patience: Knowledge and reflection are necessary to make us sensible of their value; and the greater part of a nation will always be so inconsiderate and ignorant,

ignorant, as to be incapable of entering into the proper train of reflection.

If from the lower class of people, we turn our attention to those of superior rank, there occurs a remark of a different kind : That in a country where we have the hope of obtaining the most splendid marks of distinction, and where fame has power to raise heroes, great ministers, and men of genius in every profession, we do not find that the duties of private life are best known and most respected. Mankind, while uniting to celebrate with ardour great talents and actions, consider with indifference the morals and manners of individuals. They form in their own imagination an ideal excellence, consisting of whatever can contribute to the celebrity of their country, the honour of their nation, and the political power of their prince. By habituating themselves to connect every consideration with these interests, they become extremely negligent of ordinary virtues, and sometimes even conclude that superior abilities of mind may absolutely dispense with them. Besides, if reputation shall be considered as a suitable reward for the most assiduous labour and painful self-denial, we can never imagine that moderate esteem should sufficiently indemnify those who obtain it, for the sacrifice of their passions : Neither does it follow, that this sentiment should give them strength to resist the numerous seductions

RELIGIOUS OPINIONS. 81

tions that ambitious hopes and the chances of fortune disclose to their view. This consideration acquires still more force in a kingdom, where the favour of the prince is the origin of all distinctions, and where some of these are so great, as to become equivalent to reputation itself.

To express the matter in a general and comprehensive manner; I say, That the esteem of men, even when that sentiment seems most foreign to Religion, receives, nevertheless, from Religion its principal strength, and even originates from it. This reflection is of great importance, and I will therefore endeavour to demonstrate its truth.

Let us begin with considering the original principles which, by the assent of mankind, have conferred a value on the various expressions of the sentiment of esteem. These principles we shall undoubtedly find to be, a distinct idea of the duties of men, with a general and well established notion of good morals. But neither of these conditions can be obtained without the assistance of Religion; since the connection between private and public interest, the only foundation of a morality which depends entirely on ourselves, is, as has been demonstrated, an imperfect system, and susceptible of many arbitrary interpretations. It is necessary, then, that our social obligations should be fixed in an authentic manner, if we wish our judgment and sentiments

to be truly expressive of the relation which ought to subsist between our conduct and moral perfection. Were this moral perfection only determined by human conventions,—were it despoiled of the majesty with which Religion invests it, reputation and sentiments of esteem, which are the pledge and stamp of good morals, would gradually lose their value; like coin, which cannot preserve its current worth in commerce, after having been materially altered in its weight and standard. But how could we alter the essence of morality more, and derogate more from the respect which is due to it, than by separating it from the sublime motives which Religion presents, to unite it to merely political considerations?

One objection I ought to obviate. It may perhaps be said, that the influence of honour in the army seems to be a proof, that reputation, without the aid of any other impulse, would have sufficient influence to direct the mind to the end proposed. This objection does not appear to have much force. Honour preserves a great ascendancy in armies; because among men thus assembled, it is impossible to escape shame, and the punishment incurred by cowardice. In war, the power of authority and that of fame exert their united force, because they influence a set of men engaged in one undertaking, and actuated by the same spirit, by means of that singular subordination, termed *discipline*. Thus, in the

the first ages of the Roman republic, while the army participated more of the air of the City, and was not yet familiarized to the military yoke; it was only through the sanction of an oath, supported by sentiments of Religion, that the general was able to prevent the inconstancy and defection of those who followed him to the camp. Whatever then, at present, the power of honour may be in armies, whatever influence it may have in the field of battle, where the actors, spectators and judges are assembled, and need only to practise, remark and praise one particular virtue, we can draw no deduction from it, applicable to the social relations, which are of immense extent and diversity. Besides, military honour is very far from being averse to the general principles of morality, or to those religious opinions which are their most solid support. For sentiments which depend, in any respect, on the idea of making a noble sacrifice, would lose great part of their force, if the universal basis of our duty were ever shaken.

A perfect model is necessary to fix the admiration of mankind; and many opinions which may, at first, seem purely conventional, owe their reality to a connection with such an original model.

An opinion, however, purely social, and very powerful, has resulted from our martial customs,—I mean the Point of Honour, when we consider

it in its very singular acceptation, where a man is ready to sacrifice his life to guard himself from the slightest humiliation. The rules dictated by this opinion, indeed, can only be applied amongst equals, and can extend their authority no farther than to that inconsiderable part of a nation which consists of those who are wholly devoted to the habits of society, and entirely occupied with comparisons and distinctions. It is one of the ancient appendages of military honour, and by directing all its force towards a single point, it is become a simple principle, which has been blindly transmitted, and as blindly respected. By the effect of a similar habit, savages think it their highest glory to contemn bodily pain, and to demonstrate a degree of gaiety amidst the most excruciating tortures. Can we doubt that their supernatural exultations would be weakened, the moment they were made acquainted with our most common ideas? Our Point of Honour, too, which, in its exaggerated state, resembles their death songs, could not resist metaphysical arguments, if ever metaphysics became our sole guide in morality; for after having enquired into the motives of our most important obligations, we would naturally analyse this subtle sentiment which makes us regardless of danger. Yes, if respect for Religion were absolutely destroyed,—if this simple opinion, which carries with it so many obligations, and defends so many duties, had no other

other support, the idea of honour would soon be weakened; and our personal interest being gradually disengaged from all restraint of the imagination, would assume a character so fierce and resolute, that our habitual impressions, and our relations to others, would be absolutely changed.

Permit me to add another reflection: It will always be easy to subject men to a governing opinion, when they themselves, and those who govern them, unite all their efforts to attain the same end. But if this governing opinion be not, like Religion, the general principle of our conduct,—if it cannot direct us in the different situations of life, it would, in most instances, mislead us; or, at best, its utility would be only partial and momentary. If, with a design to remedy this inconvenience, we endeavoured to multiply these opinions, they would weaken each other. For, in order powerfully to interest the imagination, it is necessary that one idea, one authority, and one important object engage the attention. Our success, in this respect, depends on the choice of a single principle, whose influence extends to all; and such is the peculiar merit of *Religious Opinions*. In the name, therefore, of Reason, of sound Policy and Philosophy, Religious Sentiments demand our most serious respect.

I resume my subject by repeating, That esteem or contempt, honour or shame, are so far from being sufficient to supply the place of the active influence of Religion, that the public opinion itself is confirmed, and in a great measure guided, by Religious Sentiments. We would soon give way to subtle reasonings on the respect due to the esteem of the world, were not the language by which that is expressed, united in our minds with something more venerable than the judgment of mankind,—were we not early impressed with a sacred respect for virtue, by a religious education. Soon would we experience, that mere worldly considerations, instead of affording the happiest basis for virtue and order, confound all order, and destroy every moral distinction. After depriving morality of its principal support, in vain should we attempt to prop it up by a scaffolding of laws, or by the force of opinion, without any guide to direct its exertions.—Disguise and dissimulation would be instantly formed into a system, the study of which would be indispensably necessary: They would even become a fair and lawful defence,—and would elude the most unwearied attention, the most acute penetration. Expressions of approbation would then be viewed in no other light than as arts ingeniously contrived to prompt the inconsiderate to acts of imprudent disinterestedness: The praise bestowed on generous actions would
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thus, by degrees, lose its value in the eyes both of those who conferred and of those who received it, and might at length become the object of derision,—an ironical expression of contempt.

But religious principles establish order, and maintain every thing in its proper place. They are, in the moral system, if we may be allowed the comparison, equivalent to that mysterious force which, acting uniformly through the whole frame of nature, retains the planets in their orbits, and directs their revolutions; yet, while it thus maintains the general order of the material world, eludes the most careful observation of men, so that they can scarce infer its existence from its effects.



C H A P. III.

Objection drawn from our Natural Disposition to Goodness.

SOME persons are of opinion, that man has received from nature a secret propensity towards all that is just and good and virtuous. In consequence of this happy inclination, the task of the moralist is confined to prevent the alteration of our original constitution: An easy task, say they, which may be accomplished without any extraordinary effort, and without having recourse to religious principles.

It is first to be observed, that the existence of this excellent innate goodness has long been a subject of dispute, as every assertion must be, of which we cannot demonstrate the truth, either by *a priori* reasoning, or by appeals to experience. It is impossible for us to determine what are the natural dispositions of mankind; for we have no proper opportunities of observing them, but as they are improved, or modelled by education and habit. One or two instances have been adduced,

duced, of children who have arrived at maturity in a forest: But we know not at what precise age they were left in that solitary state, or what might have been their dispositions, if, when brought back to society, they had not been guided by instruction, or restrained by fear: It is not very probable, that man has derived from his original nature all the dispositions which lead to goodness. It is equally inconsistent with his pride and the dignity of his nature, to entertain such an idea: The extent and power of his intellectual faculties, together with his capacity of gradual improvement, plainly shew, that he is to act his part under the direction of reason; and that he is no less distinguished from the inferior animals, that are subjected to a blind and uniform instinct, by the high destiny for which he is formed, than by the capacities with which he is endowed.

Reason, however, our faithful guide, would be incapable of subjecting us to the laws of order, justice and beneficence, were it not seconded by a nature proper to receive every noble impression and sentiment: But this reflection, far from favouring any system of independence or impiety, receives its chief force from religious principles. What then is here the natural train of thought? We first attribute to a Supreme and Universal Being, all the perfections which seem
to

to constitute his essence. From this principle we are led to presume, that we, his intelligent creatures, his noblest work, participate, in some measure, of that Divine Spirit, of which we are an emanation. But, were we ever to imagine our confidence in the existence of a God, to be a deceitful illusion, How could we believe that the fortuitous offspring of blind and unguided nature should be more disposed to good than to evil? We must therefore derive our opinion of innate goodness, from a secret sentiment, and from a complete conviction of the existence of an over-ruling Power, the first model of all perfection. Since we equally obtain from that Power, those faculties which enable us to acquire knowledge, to improve by experience, to extend our views into futurity, and to elevate our thoughts to God, it often happens that we cannot well distinguish the exertions of ability and virtue, from those efforts which depend merely on original instinct; and indeed, it would not at all contribute to our advantage to make that distinction.

We perceive clearly, that there is a correspondence and a harmony among all the parts of our moral nature; and therefore we can neither deny the existence of our natural inclination towards goodness, nor consider that inclination as a disposition which needs not the aid of religious

religious principles to strengthen it, and render it a suitable guide to conduct us through the painful journey of life. The production of wholesome fruits requires, primarily, a favourable soil: This advantage, however, would be useless without seed, and the labour of the husbandman, together with the fertilizing warmth of the sun. The Author of Nature has thought fit, that a great number of causes should continually concur to renovate the productions of the earth; and the same intention and plan seem to have determined the principle and development of all the faculties of the mind. In order to dispose intelligent beings to the love of virtue and respect for morality, there should concur, not only happy natural dispositions, but also a judicious, education, good laws, and, above all, a habitual intercourse with the Supreme Being, from which alone can arise firm resolutions, and every animating thought. But men, ambitious of comprehending an infinite diversity of relations within the limits of their weak capacity, wish to confine them to a few causes. The truth of this observation is every where discoverable; thus many wish to attribute every thing to education, whilst others, actuated by a similar motive, pretend, that our natural dispositions are the only source of our actions and intentions, of our vices and virtues. Perhaps, indeed, there
may

may be but one primary spring in the universe, one prolific principle, which may be the source of all; but, as it is at the origin of this principle, and not in its innumerable developments, that its unity can be perceived, the first great Disposer of Nature can alone be in possession of the secret. In short, since we can discover, of the immense mechanism of the world, only a few wheels, we become almost ridiculous, while we make choice sometimes of one and sometimes of another, to which we refer exclusively, the cause of the movement and action of the simplest parts of the natural and moral world.



C H A P. IV.

*Objections drawn from the Good Conduct of many
irreligious Men.*

IT may perhaps be thought, after reading the preceding chapter, that I have taken little room to treat a question on which so much has been written: But if it be allowed that I have approached pretty near to the truth, I shall need no other excuse. Researches after truth, resemble circles traced one around the other; that which is furthest from the centre has necessarily the greatest extent.

I will then endeavour, with the same brevity, to examine the objection which is to be the subject of this chapter.

Society, it is said, is at present filled with persons, who, to adopt the fashionable expression, are *absolutely divested of every prejudice*, who believe not even the existence of a Supreme Being, and yet their conduct appears as regular as that of the most religious men.

Before replying to this objection, I must make one important remark. The detractors of religion

gion constantly confound devotion and piety. They also understand devotion in an extravagant sense, which it does not naturally bear, and thus gain the advantage, by setting out on false grounds. So delicate are the sentiments, and so simple the external expressions of true piety, that they generally escape the observation of men of the world: Few of those who speak of it would be able to describe it faithfully. Devotion is usually represented as consisting chiefly in appearances, as delighting in a pompous display of austere observances, and often so much soured by the severities and restraints to which she submits, as to contract a harsh and gloomy spirit, inconsistent with whatever is mild, amiable, or indulgent: In short, devotion is sometimes blended with hypocrisy, and then it becomes a despicable assemblage of the most contemptible vices. We need only to glance on these two different portraits, and we must, at once, see that the sentiments of piety which true Religion inspires, are of a rational and elevated nature. We must then compare morality, inspired by this gentle spirit, with the morals of those men who are guided only by such principles as they frame to themselves. The one of these surely affords a much firmer basis to morality than the other; but we might deceive ourselves, were we not to extend our views beyond the narrow circle known amongst us by the name of *society*.

society. In those narrow and slight connections, which men form by the intercourse of idleness; and by joining in the same frivolous amusements, no qualities are mutually required, but such as are suitable to the circumstances of that intercourse. The code of laws, by which these connections are regulated, is very brief: Integrity in the transactions of life; constancy in friendship,—or at least a certain consistency of conduct, with a kind of dignity in manners and conversation,—and in short, general probity, are all that is necessary to form a respectable character in the eye of the world. Compacts are sometimes formed to maintain the higher virtues; but what seems to be generally preferred, is a grant of indulgence in favour of certain vices, which do not derange the order, or disturb men in the quiet enjoyment of their pleasures, and which render none unhappy, but parents, husbands, creditors, vassals, and the lowest class of the people. Far distant, indeed, from such a toleration, are those social obligations which religious morality dictates, and of which I made a short sketch, when I contrasted them with those which are imposed by civil laws. Thus, until we have reviewed the whole system of our duties, and compared them with the less rigid conventions of fashionable society, we cannot be able to judge how far the conduct of persons disengaged from every religious tie, ought

ought to be given as an example, and how far their morality may be sufficient for all the circumstances of life.

But even admitting, for a moment, this supposition, we can infer nothing contrary to the principles I have endeavoured to establish: For all those who free themselves, at a certain age, from the yoke of Religion, have been, at least, prepared by it to respect virtue. Opinions inculcated during infancy, have a great influence on the human heart, even long after our understanding has rejected the reasoning on which they were founded. The soul, early formed to the love of order, and sustained in the same disposition by the power of habit, can never be entirely divested of this principle. So that, whatever opinions are adopted at the period when the judgment is formed, they continue, in a gradual and imperceptible manner, to influence the character and direct the conduct. Besides, whilst a high respect for morality is maintained by Religion, amongst the more numerous part of mankind, those who reject such sentiments, must perceive that probity leads to esteem, and to the various advantages which depend on it. Thus a virtuous Atheist merely reminds us, that he lives where virtue is respected: His conduct does not demonstrate the inutility of religious principles; but, on the contrary, it points out their indirect influence. Methinks I here see, in a
beautiful

beautiful piece of mechanism, a part detached from its hold, which however maintains its place, by the still subsisting force of a general equilibrium.

What ! Would you then have need of Religion to be an honest man ? With this question, the opposers of Religion hope to embarrass those who wish to preserve to morality its best support. The desire of giving an honourable idea of their sentiments induces some readily to reply, That they certainly should not need the check of Religion, and that the dictates of their heart would be always sufficient to direct them. This answer is, no doubt, respectable ; but for my part, I confess, that I should merely say, that virtue, when become habitual, has so many charms, that a truly sensible man would continue to be just, though every religious sentiment were annihilated : Yet it is uncertain whether, with a political education, his principles might have been the same. I shall add, that were he to fall into a state of misery and dejection, which might make him envy the happiness of others, we could not be certain that he would have sufficient strength to resist such a revolution of sentiments. There are some questions, of which a just judgment can be formed, only in certain situations. Thus all who enjoy the favours of fortune, have, in consequence of their condition, fewer objects of envy,

and are therefore less subject to temptations; and amidst the various comforts which surround them, they can at leisure, contemplate the principles of others.

Were we to search among philosophical writers for the chief abettors of those new doctrines, and were their moral conduct cited as an example, we could not avoid observing, That a retired life, love of study, and a constant habit of reflection, must naturally diffuse a serenity all over their sentiments; besides, their thoughts being pre-occupied by abstract and general ideas, they can never experience the passions, and can seldom be personally engaged in those ardent pursuits which actuate society. We cannot then determine with certainty, with what degree of firmness they would resist temptation, if, without any other defensive arms than their principles, and no guide but convenience, they had to combat against the allurements of fortune and ambition, which continually present themselves in the course of worldly affairs. They have also, like all inventors and propagators of new systems, a degree of vanity which prompts them to multiply the number of their disciples. But how could they have promised themselves any success, if, after attacking the most respectable opinions, they had not endeavoured to prove, that their doctrines were not in opposition to morality?

morality? Besides, after having silently sapped the foundation of our dwelling, it is very necessary, that they should support the edifice for some time,—were it only while they have with us a common habitation, and during the interval in which we can judge of the utility of their instructions: In short, being the dupes of their own hearts, they frequently imagine, because they are, at the same time, irreligious by system, and just by character and habit, that Religion and virtue have no necessary union: And since, in the principal concerns of life, the slightest doubt has some influence on our actions. Is it not possible, even whilst they endeavour to overthrow religious principles, and ridicule them in conversation, that they may still seek to preserve a secret connection with them; by the propriety of their conduct? Thus, in the disputes of princes, and in the quarrels of ministers, the members of the same family sometimes artfully divide themselves, in order, at all events, that one of their friends may be in each party.

These different reflections must certainly be taken into consideration, before we can admit the inferences that might be drawn from the manners of irreligious men. But, to discredit such arguments entirely, it is sufficient to observe, that they are totally inapplicable to the most numerous class of men. Honest Atheists have never

existed among the commonalty : Religion comprehends all their knowledge in morality ; and if once they were to lose this guide, their conduct would be absolutely dependent on chance and circumstances.

It is also important to observe, That, according to the motives which relax the moral principles, there are great differences among the various characters which attend vicious actions : A depraved man, if possessed of latent sentiments of Religion, will do wrong through weakness, and according to the successive transports of his passions ; but the wicked Atheist has no fixed time of committing crimes ; neither can he be said to be seduced by opportunities, for he searches for them, and watches them with impatience : He yields not through the contagion of imitation, but takes pleasure in setting an example : He is not a corrupt fruit,—he is himself the tree evil.

Another objection has been offered, but of a quite different kind. The opposers of Religion point out the contrast, frequently observed between the conduct and religious opinions of the greater part of men. From this opposition, they would conclude that these principles are not a certain safeguard. They add, in support of their argument, that, after examining the belief of those, who have terminated their licentious lives

lives by an ignominious death, we perceive that the greater number consists of persons blindly subjected to such religious opinions.

These opinions, no doubt, cannot at all times completely repress the various sallies of our passions; but it is sufficient, that they form the most effectual restraints. There have always been, and there will be, vicious and corrupt men in every society, even where religious principles have the greatest influence; for they act not like a mechanical force, by weights, levers and springs, of which we can exactly calculate the power: Neither are they absolutely modifications of our nature; but they enlighten, guide and animate us, according to our dispositions and sensibility, and according to the degree of our own exertion in the numerous conflicts which we have to sustain. It would then be evident treachery, to attack Religion, by depicting the vices and crimes from which it has not been able to guard society, instead of fixing our attention on all the disorders which it checks or prevents.

It would be equally wrong to represent the general languor of Religion, as a proof that it has, at present, very little influence on morality. We ought rather to remark, how great that power must have been, which, even in the decline of its force, is still sufficient to contribute

so much to the maintenance of public order. We may justly exclaim, How valuable must the whole be, since we receive so great an advantage from a part !

The inferences attempted to be drawn from the opinions and faith of wretches sinking under the sword of justice, is a mere abuse of reasoning. Since men who profess Religion, form the major part of the populace in every country, we must, among them, necessarily meet the greater number of malefactors ; in the same manner that we are sure to find, in this class, the greatest number of men of a particular age, stature or complexion. If such an argument were admissible, to censure a religious education, the salubrity of breast milk, might, with the same reason, be contested, by alleging, that many sick and dying persons have received this nourishment. No common circumstance, though even a universal condition, ought to be confounded with a general cause : These two ideas are absolutely distinct.

There are other objections which equally merit a discussion ; but these I shall place in their order, after the chapter where I propose to examine, under different heads, the influence of religious opinions on our happiness. It has been already seen, and it will be more clearly perceived in the progress of this work, that I do not endeavour

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vour to elude difficulties : For, before I determined to defend, according to my abilities, a cause which I earnestly wish to render dear to mankind, I carefully studied the means : And after having fortified myself against the systems opposite to my sentiments, I can, with some confidence, disclose the motives which serve to support them.



C H A P. V.

The influence of Religious Principles on our Happiness.

HAVING demonstrated the close connection of morality with religious opinions, we have already pointed out one of the principal relations of these opinions with the public happiness; since the repose and interior tranquillity of society, essentially depend on the maintenance of civil order, and the exact observance of the laws of justice. But the greater part of the happiness of which we are susceptible, arises not from our intercourse with the community. The benefits of Religion would then be very imperfect, were they not extended to our most intimate sentiments, and were they unavailing in those secret conflicts of different affections which often agitate our souls, and distract our thoughts. Religious principles are far from deserving such a reproach. What raises them above every other doctrine and legislation, is, That they equally influence the happiness of individuals and of society. In order to examine this truth somewhat in a philosophical manner, we must, for a little, contemplate our moral nature, and attentively examine
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the origin of the enjoyments and the anxieties of our minds.

Men, at their first entrance into the world, and as soon as their intellectual faculties are disclosed, extend their views, and live in the future. Sensual pleasures and bodily pain only can detain them in the present; but in the long intervals between the suspension and recurrence of such sensations, it is by anticipation and memory that they are happy or miserable; and remembrance itself is only interesting, in proportion as it keeps up the connection between the past and the future. The influence of the future on all our moral affections, no doubt, often escapes our notice. Let us illustrate this by some examples: We fancy that the present moment alone produces happiness, while we receive praise, obtain some mark of distinction, or are informed of an unexpected increase of our fortune; and when, either in conversation, or in our closet, we are pleased with a happy flight of imagination, or some discovery of reason. These, with a number of similar enjoyments, we call *present happiness*, though they all derive their real value entirely from our connecting them in our minds with the prospect of futurity. Indeed, respect, applause, those triumphs of self-love, those harbingers of fame, and even fame itself, are acquisitions which education and habit have rendered precious, by exhibiting

hibiting beyond them some other advantage, of which they are only the symbols. Often, indeed, the last object of our ambition, is but an enjoyment of opinion, the obscure image of some more real possession. We every where see the human imagination occupied with a succession of delusive hopes: Future good is always either the immediate object of our thoughts and wishes, or perhaps, without our observing it, the reason why we value present enjoyments. Thus, either indirectly, and in a way in which it escapes our notice, or directly, and with our knowledge, all our enjoyments and objects of pursuit are placed in distant perspective;—and, thus, though constantly imposed upon, yet we are never undeceived. Enslaved by habit, it would be vain for us to attempt to separate the real advantages depending on opinion, from those delusive hopes with which they are connected, and by which we have been seduced and deceived, through the whole course of life.

There are few parts of the moral system, which agree not with this manner of explaining the chief cause of our pleasures and pains. I am very far, however, from thinking that the sentiments which unite men by the charm of friendship, and so essentially contribute to their happiness, depend on the same principles. Every thing is real in the social affections, since they consist

list only in the simple association of ourselves with others; and, in this view, they may be considered as, in some measure, enlarging our own existence; but this intimate participation of the good and evil of life does not change the essence of these affections. Friendship doubles our enjoyments and our comforts; and, the close alliance of two sympathizing souls, fortifies both against every event: But since we must always remain subjected to the same passions, futurity equally preserves its influence over us, whether we remain solitary, or live only for others.

If our moral nature, however, be such, that the object of our wishes should always appear at some distance,—if our thoughts, like the course of the waves, are ever active, and pressing forward,—if our present enjoyments have a secret connection with those imaginary advantages, which always terminate in a fleeting shadow; in short, if every thing be future in the lot of man, With what love and respect ought we to consider that grand system of our highest hopes, of which religious principles are the majestic foundation? With what encouraging prospects, far beyond all other views, does Religion present us! How great, how precious is that universal and most interesting sentiment, the desire of prolonging our existence! Nothing can be so dreadful to man as the idea of eternal annihilation. The total destruction of all those faculties which compose

his being, is, with regard to himself, equal to a dissolution of the whole universe; he ought, therefore, earnestly and above all, to seek a refuge from this overwhelming thought.

It is, no doubt, according to the natural disposition, and in proportion to the influence of religious principles on the mind, that men lay hold, with confidence, on the hopes and promises of reward offered by Religion. But when our supreme happiness is the object, obscurity, doubts and uncertainty, operate very powerfully: For, even in the affairs of human life, the greatness of the enterprise excites our ambition more than the probability of success. To what, then, should we betake ourselves,—where attach the slightest hope, were ever the belief of a God, this chief support of religious sentiments, entirely abolished, were men, from their infancy, only occupied with worldly considerations, which are as transitory as themselves, and, being thus early debased in their own eyes, should strive to stifle that innate sentiment which intimates to them the spirituality of the soul? Thus discouraged by the first principles of their education, every effort being repressed that might carry forward their thoughts, a retrospective view of the past, by recalling the irreparable loss, would too strongly attract their attention, and the mind, in the mean time, could no longer maintain the equilibrium necessary for the enjoyment of the present

sent moment. In short, the present instant, which is indeed an imperceptible fraction of time, would appear as nothing, were it not united in our thoughts to the unknown number of days and years which are before us: Since, then, the ideas of happiness and duration which we acquire by religious principles, are in no respect limited, our imagination is never forced to recur on itself, but seems to be insensibly lost in the immense extent of futurity.

While we pursue the course of a great river, with an extensive horizon open to our view, we never consider minutely the sandy banks along which we pass; but when, by changing our situation, or by twilight coming on, the prospect is contracted, our attention is then turned to the barren channel before us, though we did not before remark all its dryness and sterility. Similar to this is our situation in the career of human life. While the great and sublime thoughts of infinity elevate our hopes, and exalt our souls, we are but little affected by the troubles and difficulties strewed in our path. But if, upon changing our principles, a gloomy philosophy should darken the perspective, our attention must then be invariably fixed on the objects which surround us; and we would then, but too distinctly, perceive the vanity and illusion of all the enjoyments of which our moral nature is susceptible.

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Let us then acknowledge the blessings which we derive from religious principles. By fixing our views on the future, they save us from present misery ; they form, without our perceiving it, the charm of the moral world ; were it possible for us to destroy them by cold reasonings, a gloomy melancholy would constantly oppress our minds ; a funereal stole would appear to be spread over the charms of nature, instead of that robe of light which now embellishes them. There might, no doubt, still be some enjoyment of life, during youth, while the pleasures of sense are so prevalent as to occupy the greater part of our thoughts ; but when the passions are moderated, and the body rendered infirm by years or disease,—when that period arrives, at which moral enjoyments become the chief source of happiness, In what a deplorable state would we be, were those opinions and those hopes, totally subverted, which alone can truly encourage and comfort us, and were we deprived of that activity of imagination, which enlivens every object our anticipation can reach ?

Let us then attentively reflect on the various unhappy consequences which would inevitably result from renouncing religious principles. We would not, in them, merely lose an imaginary, an ideal prospect of happiness : We should lose at once, whatever serves, at present, to excite desire, or awaken ambition. No circumstance
appears

appears indifferent, while our actions and designs may be such as, in a manner, constantly to correspond with our duty, and while the exercise and improvement of our faculties may be considered as the commencement of an existence, of which the ultimate period lies concealed from our view : But when the awful period of final dissolution is every where presented to our eyes, and when we approach towards it every moment, What illusion could be so powerful as to save us from utter despair? Being circumscribed within the contracted space of human life, its narrow limits would be so constantly present to our thoughts, that, before engaging in any enterprise, or entering on any study, we would be often led to consider, how little such things deserve, on our part, the diligent enquiries and indefatigable application which they demand. Yes, even fame itself, which is held to be immortal, could no more so powerfully incite us, were we certainly convinced that it can only grow, rise and subsist during that short portion of time, which is, in a manner, totally overlooked by our imagination. It is necessary, that the extensive and unknown regions of futurity, if I may so speak, should still be our country, in order that we may truly experience an anxious love of lasting celebrity, and that ardent desire of performing great actions, which is its salutary consequence.

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The opposers of Religion are then, in my opinion, much mistaken, when they accuse religious sentiments, of necessarily disgusting us at worldly affairs and pleasures. The notions of eternity we receive from those principles, are, on the contrary, the chief support of that ingenious concatenation of hopes and duties, which so wonderfully composes our intellectual happiness.

Religious principles are equally adapted to the weakness and the perfections of our nature. They afford us comfort, both under our real troubles, and under such as arise from an abuse of our foresight. But above all, they are congenial with every thing that is grand and elevated in our nature. Yes, if men are animated by sublime thoughts,—if they respect the intelligence with which they are adorned,—if the true dignity of their nature can interest them, they will fly with transport, to embrace Religion, which ennobles their faculties, fortifies their minds, and by its sentiments unites them to Him, whose omnipotence astonishes their understanding. Then, indeed, considering themselves as an emanation from that Infinite Being, who is the first source of all things, they can never be drawn aside by that perverse philosophy, whose baneful lessons tend to persuade us, that our soul, our reason, liberty, and all our immaterial essence, is the mere result of a fortuitous combination,

bination,—of an accidental harmony without intelligence.

We have never perhaps observed, with sufficient attention, the various kinds of happiness which would either be destroyed, or sensibly weakened, were this discouraging doctrine ever propagated.

What then would become of that most sublime of all sentiments, *admiration*, if, instead of the grand view of the universe reviving the idea of a Supreme Being, we could only trace, in the appearances of nature, a vast existence without design, cause or destination, and if even the astonishment which we felt, were but one of the spontaneous accidents of blind matter?

What would become of the pleasure we feel in the progressive improvement, and exercise of our faculties,—if this intelligence, in which we glory, were only the result of chance, and if all our ideas were produced merely by the operation of the laws of motion? If our liberty were but a fiction, and if we had not, so to speak, any possession of ourselves?

What would become of that active spirit of curiosity, which excites us continually to observe the wonders which surround us, and which inspires us with a desire of penetrating, in some measure, into the mystery of our existence, and the secret of our origin? It would certainly be of little avail to study the course of nature, if

this science could only teach us the afflicting particulars of our *mechanical* slavery. A prisoner cannot be pleased, by drawing a picture of his fetters, or counting the links of his chain.

But how beautiful does the world appear, when we view it as the result of one single and great Thought, and when we find every where, the stamp of an Eternal Intelligence ! And how pleasing thus to live with sentiments of astonishment and adoration deeply impressed on our hearts !

What a subject of exultation are the endowments of the mind, when we can consider them as a participation of a sublime nature, of which God alone is the perfect model ! And how delightful is the ambition of elevating ourselves still more by exercise, and improving all our faculties !

How charming, in short, is the contemplation of nature, when, at every new discovery, we seem to advance a step towards an acquaintance with that exalted wisdom which has prescribed laws to the universe, and maintains it in harmony ! It is then, and only then, that study is truly interesting, and the progress of knowledge an increase of happiness. Under the influence of the opinions of materialists, our curiosity languishes,—our admiration is mere instinct,—and the sentiments we have of ourselves are altogether fictitious. On the contrary, with
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the idea of a God, all is animated,—all is reasonable and true. Indeed, that truly happy idea appears as necessary to the moral nature of man, as heat is to vegetation.

It may perhaps be thought, that, in examining the influence of Religion on happiness, I have dwelt on several considerations, which are not equally important to all men. There are, indeed, some more particularly adapted to that part of society, whose minds have been cultivated by education ; but I wish not, therefore, to withdraw my attention from the numerous class of mankind, whose happiness and misery depend on simple ideas proportioned to their circumstances and capacities.

Those who have been left, by the misfortunes of their parents, to the wide world, devoid of property, and deprived of the resources which depend on education, appear to have the most pressing and constant need of the assistance which religious principles afford. Men of this class, condemned to hard labour, are, as it were, confined in a rough and uniformly barren path,—where every succeeding day resembles the preceding, in which no obscure hopes nor flattering illusion can amuse them. They know that there is a wall of separation between them and fortune ; and if they carry forward their views in life, they only discover the dreadful state any infirmity would reduce them to, and the deplorable situation to

which they may, at last, be exposed, by suffering cruel neglect in their old age. With what transport then will they, in such circumstances, grasp at the comfortable hopes which Religion presents! With what satisfaction will they learn, that after this probationary state, where the disparity of ranks and circumstances chagrined and distressed them, there is a time to succeed, in which all conditions will be equal! How piteous would their condition be, were they to renounce that single sentiment, or rather general idea, which they are not only able to comprehend with ease, but can readily apply to every event and circumstance.—‘It is God’s will,’ say they to themselves, and this thought, at once, confirms their resignation.—‘God will reward you for it,’ say they to others, on receiving a favour; and these words remind them, that the God of the rich and powerful is also theirs; and that far from being indifferent to their fate, He deigns Himself to discharge their obligations. How many other popular expressions constantly recal the same sentiment of confidence and consolation? This continual dependence of the poor on the Deity, raises them in their own estimation; prevents them from sinking under a load of contempt, and often affords them courage to resist the insolence of their haughty oppressors. What a surprising effect is thus produced by an idea so simple!

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The moral advantages, of which Religion is the source, resemble the grand blessings of nature which belong equally to all men; and this I consider, above all the characteristics of Religion, to be more particularly the seal of a divine hand. The Sun, in the distribution of his rays, observes neither rank nor fortune: In the same way those comforting sentiments which depend on the belief of a Supreme Being; and all the hopes connected therewith, become the property of the poor as well as the rich,—of the weak as well as the powerful,—and can be as securely enjoyed under the humble roof of a cottage, as in a superb palace. Civil laws give a sanction to the inequality of possessions, and Religion alone sweetens the bitterness of this hard disproportion.

We could not avoid being touched with just compassion, were we to suppose the greater part of mankind deprived at one stroke of the only thought which supports their courage. They would no more have a God to confide their sorrows with,—they would no more attend His ordinances, to implore a spirit of resignation and tranquillity,—they would have no motive for raising their looks to heaven: Their eyes would be cast down, fixed for ever on this abode of grief, of death and eternal silence. Then those consoling tears, which are shed from a pleasing persuasion, that there exists somewhere commiseration

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tion and goodness, would no more moisten their eyes.

Every one must have beheld those veteran soldiers, who are so often seen prostrated on the pavement of the sanctuary, erected in the midst of their august retreat. Their hair, which time has whitened, and their forehead marked with honourable scars ; that tottering step which age alone could impress,—all, at first view, inspire respect ; but what emotions do we feel, when we see them lift up and join their trembling and enfeebled hands, to invoke the God of the universe,—of their soul and thought ;—when we see them forget, in this affecting scene of devotion, their present pains and past sufferings ; and when we see them rise with a countenance more serene, and expressive of the tranquillity and hope which devotion has diffused through their souls ! Pity them not, in these moments, ye who estimate happiness only by worldly enjoyments ! Their looks are humbled,—their body trembles, and death awaits their steps : But this inevitable end, whose very image terrifies you, they can see advancing without alarm. Their souls have approached Him who is good ;—who can do every thing, and whom none ever loved without receiving comfort. Come and contemplate this sight, ye who despise Religion,—ye who boast of scientific intelligence, come and behold, how little your pretended knowledge avails in promoting

moting happiness! You must then either change the fate of men, and give them all, if you can, some portion of the enjoyments of life, or you must respect that sentiment which enables them to repulse the injuries of fortune. And since even the policy of tyrants has never dared to destroy it,—since their power has never been sufficient to accomplish this savage enterprise; Would you, to whom Nature has given superior endowments, be more cruel, more inexorable than they? Or if by this pitiless doctrine, you wish to deprive the old, the sick, and the indigent, of the only idea of happiness, which they can possess, Go to those dungeons, those dreary cells, where the wretched prisoners struggle with their chains, and shut up, with your own hands, the only aperture through which any ray of light can reach them!

It is not, however, merely a single class of society which derives a constant advantage from religious sentiments. Religion affords comfort to every one who has suffered by the abuse of authority, by public injustice, or by various misfortunes,—to the virtuous man who has been calumniated,—to him who having once erred, has been censured with too much rigour; and, in short, to all those who, being convinced of the purity of their conscience, earnestly seek for a

secret witness of their intentions, and an enlightened judge of their conduct.

A man of exalted character, endowed with sensibility of heart, also experiences the necessity of maintaining in his mind, the conception of a Supreme Being, in whom he may concentrate all the ideas of perfection which fill his imagination. To Him he refers those sentiments, which are inapplicable to the perishing objects that surround him. In God alone he can find an inexhaustible source of astonishment and admiration, and with Him only, he can refresh and purify his thoughts, when fatigued by a view of the vices of mankind, and of their perpetual and uniform round of passions and gratifications. In short, the happy idea of a God, at all times, softens and embellishes the path of life; and by means of it, we become delightfully interested in all the beauties of nature. By it every thing animated enters, as it were, into communication with us. Yes, the rustling of the wind, the murmuring of the water, and the gentle agitation of the leaves, all excite our reflection and melt our souls, when we discover in them the works of Him whom we love,—when we can there distinguish the vestiges of His footsteps, and the traces of His intention; and above all, when we consider, that we ourselves contribute to the display of His power, and the splendour of His goodness.

Piety

Piety adds a new charm to the enjoyments of friendship. Our sentiments cannot be circumscribed within certain limits: Boundless, like thought, they would be agitated by continual anxiety, and we should view the revolution of years, and the rapid course of time, with the utmost terror, did not those beneficent opinions which enlarge our views of futurity, come to our assistance. Thus, while we are separated from the objects of our affection, our solitary reflections recal them, as it were, to our presence; and this contributes more or less to our happiness, in proportion to our belief of a future existence: Then, indeed, the tender melancholy in which we are plunged, is changed into a pleasing emotion. But you, alas! above all, you who, being timid amidst a bustling world, or discouraged by disappointments, find yourself a solitary wanderer on the earth, and partake not of the passions which agitate the greater part of mankind! you want a friend,—and you only see alliances formed from interested views. You want a comforter,—and you only find ambitious men, strangers to all who have not power or distinguished reputation: In short, you need a confident, possessed of sensibility,—but the active scenes of society dissipate, or at least weaken, every sympathetic affection. But even when you have obtained this friend, this comforter, and this confident,—when you are united to them

them by the strongest and most tender ties,—when you live in a son, a husband, or a beloved wife, What else than the idea of a God, can enable you to support the dreadful thought of separation? Ah! in such moments, With what transport do we embrace those opinions which cherish the hope of continuity and duration! How gladly then do we lend an ear to those words of comfort, which are so perfectly consonant with the desires and the wants of our soul! How horrible is the thought of eternal annihilation, when associated with the sentiment of love! How can we unite to that gentle participation of our interests and happiness, which is the most animated charm of life, the inward conviction, and constant image of death without hope, and lasting dissolution? How shall we offer the idea of absolute *oblivion*, to those affectionate minds, who have centered all their self-love, all their ambition, in the objects of their esteem and tenderness; and who, having, as it were, renounced themselves, are entirely deposited in the bosom of another, to subsist there by the same breath of life, and the same destiny? In short, How could they bear to pronounce, at the tomb which they may one day bedew with their tears, the overwhelming words, FOR EVER and FOR EVER! Oh! horror of horrors for a feeling mind! Oh! hideous gulph, to which, if a man of sensibility shall ever approach

approach for a moment, may a friendly cloud overshadow the dark abyss! Fears and sorrow afford some comfort, when we bestow them on a beloved shade,—while we can mingle with our griefs the name of a God, and when this name is considered as the universal restorative of nature: But were the whole universe deaf to our complaints,—were the shades of eternal darkness to hide from us the object of our love, and were that endless night fast approaching, ready to involve us in the same destruction,—were the unhappy survivor, who holds, as it were, one end of the band of union and felicity which death has broken, for ever deprived of the hope of reuniting it,—were the forlorn mourner, whose mind is entirely occupied with the recollection of a beloved object, unable to say, ‘That affectionate heart is still somewhere; that pure and celestial soul waits for me; perhaps calls me, to the presence of that unknown Being, whom we have with joint consent adored;’—and if, instead of this precious thought, we were, without any doubt or uncertainty, to consider the earth as a sepulchre for ever shut—My heart sinks within me, and I cannot proceed. Unable to contend with such dreadful images, nature itself seems to dissolve, and the universe falling to wreck, appears ready to overwhelm you in its ruins. O thou source of our hopes, sublime idea of a God! abandon not the ~~man~~ who possesses

less sensibility. Thou art his courage,—Thou art his desire,—Thou art his life. Leave him not desolate, but defend him from the ascendancy of that insipid and fatal philosophy which would afflict him doubly, under pretence of giving him comfort.

I will make another effort; and I address myself to you who boast of being enlightened by a fresh ray of wisdom.—I am oppressed by the deepest sorrow; a father, a mother, on whom I entirely depended, who guided me by their counsels, who guarded me with tender solicitude, these kind parents have been snatched from me: A son, a daughter, both my comfort and pride, have been cut off from my embraces: A wife, my faithful and beloved companion, whose words, whose actions, whose very looks, were the joy of my life, has vanished from my arms. A moment of strength remains, and I come to you, profound philosophers, What have you to say? ‘Seek for amusements; turn your thoughts elsewhere: An eternal abyss separates you forever from the objects of your love; and those painful recollections which overpower you with grief, are only a form of vegetation, the last play of organized matter.’ Alas! have you ever experienced the force of love, and can you coolly pronounce these cruel words! Away with your mock consolation, which I dread more than all my anguish. But
thou,

thou, O daughter of Heaven, lovely and mild Religion, what dost thou say? ' Hope, hope; ' what God gave thee, He can again restore: ' Ah! how different is the language of these two comforters? How does the one debase us; and how much are we exalted by the other! How grievously does the former violate our best and dearest sentiments; while the latter gently accords with every idea that can contribute to our happiness! Mankind are to chuse between these guides; or rather they are to judge, if they love darkness better than light, and death better than life. They are to determine, if they prefer parching winds to the refreshing dew; the frost of winter to the charms of spring; and the barren rock, to the fairest gifts of animated nature.

I affirm, that this world, without the idea of a God, would be a mere desert, where men would only find a few fascinating delusions; from which, being set free by the light of reason, nothing would appear all around, but subjects of sadness and discouragement. I have beheld the vain pomp of grandeur, the dreams of ambition, and the allurements of fame; and even whilst the illusion was most dazzling, my heart still shrunk from it, and was attracted towards a more sublime idea, and a more substantial consolation. I have felt that a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, diffused a charm
over

over every circumstance of life. I have experienced that this sentiment alone was able to inspire men with true dignity: For such things as are merely personal, and only tend to raise one man a few degrees above another, are of small value. We have no right to exult, unless we elevate the character of human nature, while we exalt ourselves. We must consider our nature as connected with that Sublime Intelligence, which seems to have dignified the human mind with some of its attributes. Then, indeed, those trivial distinctions which are attached to transitory things, and on which vanity exercises her sway, almost totally disappear. We then leave to this queen of the world her rattle and toys, and seek elsewhere a better portion: Then, virtue, exalted sentiments, and elevated views, appear the only honours which merit the emulation of mankind.



C H A P. VI.

The same subject continued. The influence of Virtue on Happiness.

HAVING made it appear that Religion, so necessary to feeling minds, agrees perfectly with the moral nature of man, I come next to shew, that the habitual practice of virtue, enjoined as a duty in the name of God, is no way inconsistent with our happiness. And after considering this important truth, I will prove this doctrine to be perfectly consistent with what has been said in the first chapter of this work, on the impossibility of making men attentive to the public interest, by the single motive of personal interest.

It cannot be denied that virtue often obliges us to conquer our appetites, and struggle with our passions. But if these conflicts, and the victory which attends them, lead to more solid and durable pleasures, than those which folly and vice present, How much are those mistaken, who imagine that the temporary and beneficial
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restraints enjoined by the laws of morality amount to an absolute sacrifice of every enjoyment ?

If we fix our attention on the various objects of desire which occupy the thoughts of men, we must at once perceive, that, were they to abandon themselves to their propensities without controul, they would often widely deviate from that state of happiness, which forms the object of their wishes. None of the blessings which are strewed here and there in our path, can entirely fill the void of life. Do the gratifications of sense enslave us ? Their duration is determined by our own weakness ; and we cannot break through the immutable limits opposed by nature. Are we desirous of the advantages dependent on opinion, as honour, praise, and the exterior splendour bestowed by riches ? Soon will we perceive, when we have obtained them, that the charm has vanished. They are like Proteus in the fable, who appeared a god only at a distance. Men have therefore more need than many have supposed, of an interest independent of their senses and imagination ; and this interest we find in the duties religious morality inculcates and establishes.

At all times, and in all circumstances, we may have a choice between good and evil. Thus, virtue may be continually in a state of action ; and we find it applicable to almost every minute, and seemingly indifferent, occurrence of life.

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For virtue alone has the happy power of connecting little things with great and sublime sentiments; and it is virtue only, that can be accompanied by that consciousness of rectitude, which, while it is the concomitant of our thoughts and actions, seems to enlarge our existence, and to afford joys unknown to those who do not act from principle.

The love of pleasure, vanity, and ambition, are passions which would soon be extinguished, were they not maintained by the continual bustle of society, which produces new scenes, and displays, every moment, some change of decoration. Virtue, satisfied with its own prospects, requires only a uniform succession of similar sentiments; and however its paths may be varied, the end it has in view is ever the same.

When we seek for those enjoyments which depend on the imaginary advantages of opinion, we rest our happiness on laws dictated by others: And hence must arise a discordancy, by which we will be affected with a thousand painful emotions. Virtue has no associates in her counsels; she herself determines what is right. In this respect, a virtuous man is the most independent being that exists; for it is from himself alone that he receives commands, and expects approbation. Yes, the obscure man, who does good in secret, is more master of himself, than any one seemingly loaded with all the goods of fortune,

who has need of the transient modes of fashion, to regulate his vanity, and determine his taste.

The trivial passions, which are directed to worldly objects in search of happiness, lead us from one scene of illusion to another, and the ultimate objects of our desire still appear at a distance. Virtue, on the contrary, carries its recompense in itself. It trusts not for happiness, to the success of uncertain events, but to the firmness of its own resolution,—to the calmness which accompanies it, and the secret sentiment which precedes it. Recollection composes the principal happiness of virtue, whilst worldly vanity is tormented by the remembrance of what is gone for ever; and with regard to the violent emotions of the passions in general, the past is but a gloomy shadow, from which proceeds, from time to time, sorrow and remorse.

The intervals which occur between the starts of violent passions, are always filled up with sadness and apathy. It is well known, that, according to the laws of nature, strong and violent sensations produce languor, the moment the tumult is over. Virtue knows none of the irregular emotions, in the enjoyment of those pleasures peculiar to itself, because all its principles are firm, and it acts, as it were, round its own centre. Besides, it is constantly inviting us, to set a just value on that sort of happiness which is best accommodated to our powers. It dictates its first laws in the
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bosom of domestic life, and employs all its strength to sustain, by the ties of duty, our most rational and simple affections.

Virtue is peculiarly useful in delivering men from the tormenting solicitude of doubt and hesitation, by presenting a general system of conduct ; and, above all, by marking out a decided path, which may guide them in their thoughts and in their actions. Men who are hurried away by their imagination, and who find themselves always deceived by phantoms, are ready to adorn those which have last escaped them with the most glowing colours ;—virtue, on the contrary, only sets a value on what it possesses, and never knows regret. It would seem, at first glance, that the desires and caprices of the imagination, cannot be subjected to the slightest restraint : But these nimble harbingers of our will, have need of a guide, and often of a master. Our first inclinations and sentiments are generally feeble and wavering ; and it is essential to our happiness, that the vibrating stalk from which they spring, should be fixed and supported : And such is the service which virtue renders to the human mind.

We discover no uniformity in the conduct of those who are not influenced by motives of duty. Convenience being their only guide, they have too great a multiplicity of matters to regulate and determine upon every moment. To render

the task of managing ourselves more simple, we should submit to the government of a principle which may be readily applicable to most of our deliberations.

In short, virtue has this great advantage, that it holds sacred the private rights of the different members of the community; and thus all its sentiments seem to be united to the general harmony. The passions, on the contrary, are almost always hostile. The vain man desires that others should grace his triumphs,—the proud, wishes them to feel their inferiority,—the ambitious, that they should not impede his career,—the imperious, that they should bend to him. The case is similar with regard to the various competitions which arise from an immoderate desire of fame or fortune. Every one wishes to go alone in the path he chooses, or, at least, to advance before the rest; and every one being occupied with his own interest, inconsiderately prejudices that of his neighbours. Virtue, following a very different course, fears neither rivals nor competitors; it does not jostle with any one. The road is spacious, and all may walk at their ease. Morality is the tie of that happy alliance, which connects men by the same sentiments, the same motives and hopes, and makes them dependent on that chain of duties and principles, which unites the virtues of men to the grand Model of all Perfections.

Virtue

Virtue guards us from the snares of sensuality : It checks our blind desires, and is the basis of our truest wisdom. It protects not, indeed, our interests of a day, and our momentary pleasures ; but it is the safeguard of our whole life. It is, so to speak, the protector of futurity, the representative of duration ; and becomes, to the *feelings*, what foresight is to the *mind*. With regard to our private conduct, then, we ought to consider virtue as a prudent friend, taught by the experience of all ages, who directs our steps, and never lets the taper waver, whose salutary light ought to guide us in our course. Our tumultuous passions seem each to dispute the honour of ruling us without controul. It is therefore necessary that a master should assign to each its proper limits,—one who may be able to keep all those petty domestic tyrants in peace,—one who may command immediate respect, and disconcert their combinations, like Ulysses arriving suddenly amidst the hundred kings who had taken possession of his palace.

Virtue, some will say, severe in its sentiments, and austere in its forms, might deprive us of our greatest happiness,—the pleasure of being beloved. I answer, that virtue, in its perfect state, has none of these characteristics. I consider virtue to be a just sentiment of order, which, far from banishing other comforts, is naturally conducive to them. Thus, benevolence and

forbearance, so suitable to human weakness,—the social spirit, so consistent with our nature,—that suavity of manners and discourse, which is the amiable expression of a heart that seeks to unite itself with others,—all these qualities, far from being strangers to true virtue, are its concomitants and brightest ornaments.

In short, to be brief on a subject of such latitude, virtue is connected with all those ideas which tend to enlarge the mind. It accustoms us, early in life, to weigh consequences, and frequently to sacrifice our immediate pleasures to distant considerations. Of all our sentiments, virtue carries us farthest beyond our present existence, and consequently has the nearest relation to thought. By virtue, then, man must acquire a knowledge of all his strength and grandeur. Vice, on the contrary, confines us within the narrowest limits. It seems to be conscious of its own deformity, and fears all that surrounds it. It would fix us to a single object,—a single moment, and would concentrate all our existence in one small point.

I must add, that virtue, by uniting all our sentiments and actions to a certain motive, habituates the mind to orderly and just apprehensions, and prevents us from wandering in uncertainty. Thus I have often thought, that, in the administration of public affairs, an immoral man is not dangerous merely by his vices ; we
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may also fear, that he is unable to take a comprehensive view, or to collect his thoughts so as to direct them towards any general principle. He perceives nothing of the general harmony, and every rule becomes burdensome to him. He can only act by starts ; and it is merely by his versatility, that he sometimes stumbles on what is right.

It may then be truly said, that morality serves as ballast to our sentiments. Its aid enables us to go on in our course, without being continually agitated by the caprices of our imagination, and without being obliged to turn back at the first appearance of an obstacle.

Thus virtue, whilst it enlarges the mind, also gives becoming dignity to the character. Of all the qualities of men, there is none so truly respectable as that elevation of thought, sentiment and manners, so rarely met with,—that majestic consistency of character, which truth alone can preserve, but which the smallest degree of boasting or affectation would disconcert and banish. This elevation of mind resembles not pride and vanity ; for it is its highest ornament, that it seeks not the homage of others. The man who is endowed with this real dignity, is placed even above his judges. He accounts not with them : He lives under the government of his conscience ; and, proud of such a noble ruler, he depends not on any other guide. But as this grandeur

is entirely in his own breast, it necessarily ceases to exist, when he dictates to others what he expects from them ; and it can only be restrained within its just limits, by those simple virtues, which are of all others the least dazzling.

To the same principle, men owe that noble respect for truth, which is the highest ornament of a great soul. To it is owing that happy simplicity of thought and discourse, which indicates a conscience that requires not to be kept on its guard. A man who is truly honest, considers disguise as a detractor, and desires to appear as he really is. It is not his interest to conceal his weaknesses ; for these, in a generous heart, are, for most part, united to some good dispositions ; and perhaps frankness might have become the policy of his mind, if it had not been one of the qualities of his character.

There is a native beauty in every virtue, which delights us without reflection. Our moral sense, when it is improved by education, is pleased with that social harmony which the sentiments of justice preserve. Those enjoyments are unknown to selfish men, who are insensible to every kind of concord, and who merit our contempt in one essential particular : They wish to avail themselves of that respect which others have for order and virtue, without subjecting themselves to the same rules, and without candidly declaring their intention. In this view, a want of morality,

lity, seems to me, a real breach of the laws of hospitality.

In short, talents, and those faculties of the mind which immediately belong to nature, can never be applied to great objects, without the aid of morality. There is no other way of uniting the interests of men, and of gaining their love and respect. Honesty resembles those ancient idioms, to which we must accommodate our speech, in order to be understood by the multitude; and a language is never well known without habitual practice. In circumscribed situations, good sense sometimes enables us to acquire an ascendancy. There men are taken one by one; and we often engage them by studying their characters, and proportioning ourselves to their depth. But on a more extensive scene, and chiefly in public administration, where we must consider men as a collective body, it is necessary to provide a tie sufficient to comprehend the whole; and this can only be accomplished by the union of talents and virtue. When I see homage paid by a nation to virtuous characters,—when I remark the almost instinctive judgment which assists in discerning them,—when I see nothing loved or praised that is not connected with pure virtue, and noble intention,—I return to my favourite sentiment, and I recognise in these general emotions, the stamp of a Divine Hand.

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HAVING given a slight sketch of the various advantages which flow from regularity of principles and propriety of conduct, it may perhaps be asked, If man may not be attached to morality, by the single motive of personal interest? I formerly mentioned, that I intended to answer this objection, which I now do as follows: Virtue, in its most improved state, such as we have represented it, is not the work of a moment. It must be called forth and strengthened by degrees; but it would be nipped in the bud, were we to destroy those simple opinions which cherish it,—were we to abolish the only end and motive perceptible by men of every capacity,—and were we to weaken the sentiments which tend to encourage those who respect the laws of morality, and wish to promote their cultivation.

Besides, it is not virtue singly, but virtue when united with its different motives, which contributes to our happiness. This is an important observation, and the truth of it may be easily demonstrated. Employment is generally reckoned the most certain source of those agreeable impressions, of which our nature is susceptible; but its charm would vanish, if it did not lead to some recompense; if it did not show in perspective, an increase of wealth,—the gratification of self-love,—a chance for fame, or some other advantage, of which we are ambitious. Vainly is it said, that the exercise of our faculties is itself a pleasure.

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It is only so, in so far as it offers to our view a train of prospects succeeding each other. But there must always be a strong motive to urge us on to the course; our bark must be driven on by the wind: In short, every kind of labour requires encouragement; though labour, proportioned to our strength, may contribute more to our happiness than sloth and idleness. This truth would strike us still more forcibly, if we were able to analyze it with sufficient accuracy, and to distinguish clearly the degree of happiness annexed to action and employment itself, from that which relates entirely to the end and motive of that action.

These reflections are equally applicable to virtue. We can easily perceive, from considering the effects of virtue, that it is an excellent guide in the course of life; and we must also discover, at the same time, that, like employment, it requires some incitement, some obvious encouragement, accommodated to every understanding. Religious sentiments afford this encouragement to virtue; and it could not be separated from such motives and hopes as Religion presents, without destroying every affinity it has with the happiness of mankind.

I readily perceive the great advantages we may derive from morality; but I observe, at the same time, that, in order to follow its counsels with confidence and firmness, the greater part of mankind

mankind want that degree of science, and that power of reflection, which the study of a matter so complex, necessarily requires. We, therefore, need some motive to excite our first effort,—to dispose us to self-denial,—and to determine us to struggle with courage against the dominion of the present moment.

In short, even when, by sophistical reasoning, some philosophers have thrown the true principles of order and happiness into confusion,—when, by their address, they may lead us to doubt of the kind and degree of influence we should assign to religious opinions,—the legislators of a nation ought never to listen to their subtle distinctions. Metaphysical sentiments and ideas are only proper for statesmen, when used to defend them from the ascendancy of specious errors, and to confirm their respect for useful truths. But a wise statesman, in regulating his thoughts and actions, will always employ the most simple ideas; nor will he despise those common maxims and principles, of which time rather than science has demonstrated the utility. These may be considered as so many lessons, which long experience has gradually divested of every thing unfavourable to natural morality, and the innate sentiments of men,



C H A P. VII.

Of Religious Sentiments, as connected with the Sovereign.

THE inhabitants of many nations have subjected their wills to the authority of an individual. They have thus erected a perpetual monument to the spirit of discord and injustice, which has so frequently reigned amongst them. It is true, that they have, from time to time, recollected their ability of asserting their natural rights. But Monarchs, aware of their inconstancy, have taken care to fortify the springs of authority, by surrounding themselves with standing armies. They have only left their subjects the power of being disgusted with their slavery. Soldiers and taxes have mutually supported each other; and by means of their mutual action, the Sovereign becomes master and director of every thing. With what vast power of dispensing good and evil is he then entrusted! We must, therefore, wish that his mind were impressed with powerful moral principles, proportioned

portioned to the immense extent of his duty. But what effect can morality have, if he believe not that it is supported by a divine sanction,—if he consider it as a human institution, which he has power to break or modify at pleasure? In that case, he will examine, like other men, how far his private interest agrees with that of the public, and his conduct will depend on the result of this calculation.

I confess, that in the elevated situation in which kings are placed, they cannot experience those passions which proceed from our trivial competitions: But what a multitude of other passions have they to repress? And with what celerity must that be done, since they never experience contradiction, and are not, like the greater part of men, obliged, on some occasions, to reflect deliberately? Besides, though Sovereigns are supposed to be sheltered, by their situation, from the temptation offered by self-interest, and the desire of fortune or advancement, they are far from being divested of every sentiment of this kind. They feel those emotions towards other princes. Thus their envy, ambition and revenge become very dangerous, since, by means of war, they involve all their subjects in their quarrels. Then, indeed, were they freed from religious ties, they might consider morality as an ingenious invention, to render the maintenance of public order more easy, and preserve
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that subordination which secures their power ; but they themselves would not acknowledge its authority,—far less would they take the lead in obeying its dictates.

It will no doubt be said, that a king who pursues the path of virtue, will be recompensed by the love of his subjects ; but I have already shown, that the influence of public opinion would be but very weak, if the moral principles which guide that opinion, were not supported by Religion. It should also be observed, that elogium and applause, that kind of homage so flattering to individuals, has not an equal effect on princes, who cannot, like private men, consider this suffrage as an earnest or forerunner of exaltation. By the continual view of the victories and advantages obtained by others, the desire of respect and distinction is constantly maintained. It may, perhaps, proceed, in some measure, from the stimulation of envy ; or, at least, from those jarring interests, and those selfish struggles, of which society alone can be the theatre. Princes being without rivals, are not susceptible of such impressions. The flattery they have so early imbibed, and the partial and interested praise lavished on them, render them less sensible to merited applause than other men. In short, exaggerated praise soon becomes a dull monotony, and extinguishes, by its uniformity, that emulation which may be excited by a just degree
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of admiration and respect. It would then be, indeed, very dangerous to repose on the power of public opinion, as a check sufficient to replace, in the minds of princes, the restraining force of religious morality.

I will now make another important remark : Those who are placed around the Monarch, frequently mislead his judgment, by the nature and tendency of the encomiums they bestow on him. The praises offered to a Monarch, have always a taint of slavish adulation. Thus, in countries where the Sovereign is absolute, a look, a word from the Prince, which seems, for an instant, to efface the distance that separates him from his subjects, delights them ; and their enthusiasm, in those moments, persuades the monarch that it is sufficient for him to smile, in order to render his people happy. Dangerous illusion,—sad effect of debasement of character ! in short, when the yoke is rendered habitual, men become pleased with exalting the power of him to whom they are obliged to submit : They love to see their servile companions multiplied : And as the greater part of them have seldom any access to the prince, vanity persuades them, that, by affecting to participate in the royal grandeur, they seem to contract a sort of familiarity with it. Therefore, without considering whether the Sovereign will be better able to make them happy, by enlarging his territories, and by acquiring more subjects,

subjects, and consequently, subjecting himself to more cares, they extol the conquering warrior ; and thus invite princes to prefer military glory to every other pursuit. As the multitude can quickly comprehend this kind of merit, and as the gaining of a battle is a simple idea, readily comprehended by men of all ranks and capacities, military victories alone are universally extolled, and these alone are thought sufficient to excuse broken treaties, violated oaths, and alliances abandoned. In short, such is the absurd extravagance of the praise bestowed on warlike achievements, that the tranquillity of the state,—the repose of the people,—the mild blessings of peace, are no more considered as the great and ultimate objects of the successful toils of the Monarch. History itself, often presents those happy times, as the days of obscurity, which only served to prepare and educate for blood and carnage, those heroes,—those kings dissatisfied with their lot, who became warriors through ambition ; and to whom, because they were happy in their conquests, some historians would have us to assign the highest honours, and the noblest wreaths of fame.

Thus, the public opinion, and the voice of renown sometimes deceive Princes, and appear in opposition to those moral instructions, and those ancient rules of legislation, which point out the interest of the people as the chief object of the

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Sovereign's attention,—which require him not merely to seek celebrity by warlike actions, but to enforce those duties which become the high character of Guardian of the Public Welfare,—those extensive duties, that are better discharged by the secret labour of paternal vigilance, than by the noise of the drum, and by the instruments of destruction.

LET us now consider the effect of public opinion on Sovereigns, with regard to the interior functions of administration alone. Here an essential observation readily occurs: The thirst of glory is strongly felt, when a Prince finds some great abuses to be reformed, and when he hopes to make regularity succeed to confusion. But, when this task is fulfilled, and nothing remains but to preserve the good order which subsists, the love of fame has not sufficient aliment: The virtue of a Prince is then, indeed, the only true security of the public welfare.

It may be possible for a Prince to regulate the affairs of his kingdom in such a manner, that scarce any thing shall remain to be done, which might distinguish the reigns of his immediate successors. New troubles and fears would then be necessary to awake, in the breasts of the people, the sentiment of respect for their Sovereign, and to restore the original force and ascendancy of royal authority.

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We may also, on the contrary, figure a very different period, when, by a progressive degradation of character, the public opinion shall no more lead the way, and the praises which the enfeebled voice of fame resounds, no more be considered as a powerful motive of ambition and reward. Thus, in a country, or in a metropolis, where venality becomes triumphant,—where every one pursues his fortune by contributing to the intrigues and vices of those who bestow it, neither regard for the real interest of the people, nor an attention to lighten their burdens, would be a subject of renown. In like manner, in a country where despotism reigns, and the people are accustomed to prostrate themselves before superior power, they would acknowledge no other idol. We could not there acquire the praise of our contemporaries, by elevation of character,—by tempering the exercise of authority with wisdom, and by allowing to the citizens that degree of freedom which they may safely enjoy. Morality, then alone, can, at all times, and in all circumstances, resist those revolutions of custom and opinion, of which men are ever susceptible, and of which history furnishes so many examples.

I must not omit another important consideration : Princes, by the elevation of their rank, and their influence on the manners of the nation, find themselves in that peculiar situation, where one is rather called to direct the public opinion than

to receive from it instruction and encouragement. We must therefore wish that a Monarch should have such principles as flow from the heart, and are founded on reflection; from such sentiments alone, he can, at all times, derive a strength properly his own, and a due proportion of courage. A Prince must weigh his own conduct, and decide on his own greatness. Sublime moral principles should maintain in his heart an ideal model of perfection, with which he may constantly compare the opinions of the world, and the private judgment of his conscience.

In short, and this reflection will agree, in a general way, with the preceding remarks,—The public opinion, when unfavourable, does not always penetrate immediately to the ear of the Prince. It prevails throughout the kingdom, and wanders around the palace; but no whisper reaches him. Vanity, pride, and every vice, find an easier access. The old courtiers ask, with indignation, What it has to do there? and the humbler creatures, that are fluttering about in pursuit of interest or favour, turn it to ridicule. The minister whom it pursues with clamour and importunity, makes light of it to his master; and if it comes to the knowledge of the Prince, some method is devised to weaken the impression, by attributing the discontents of which it is expressive to private passions, and giving,

giving the name of a *factions spirit*, to a just indignation against vice. Yes, such is the unhappy fate of princes, that the peace of a state is often tottering, before they can be informed of the sentiments of the people, and discover the truth. These considerations afford a further proof, that the power of public opinion can never equal in utility, those grand principles of morality, which, by the aid of religious sentiments, are fixed in the hearts of men ; and there dictate laws and enforce their observance, without distinction of birth, rank or dignity.

But if, from Sovereigns, we carry our view to those who share their confidence, we shall, still more evidently, perceive the absolute necessity of an active and governing morality. Ministers, destitute of virtue, are more to be feared than Sovereigns indifferent to the public good. As they have been but lately elevated above the crowd, they know better than the Monarch, how to take advantage of the vices and passions of mankind ; and as they are closely connected with society, and with the different orders of the state, their corruptions are propagated, and their dangerous influence spreads all around. But at length, however, attacked by the public censure, they become still more mischievous by the means which they adopt to ward off danger : For despairing of their artifices, before the watchful eyes of the whole nation, they turn their

addresses against the Prince : They study and pry into all his weakneſſes ; and they artfully encourage ſuch of them as may protect or cover the defects of their own characters. At the ſame time, they endeavour to adorn vice with every grace that can render it amiable ; and attempt to throw an odium on virtue, by repreſenting it as auſtere, imperious, unfociable, and almoſt incompatible with our cuſtoms and manners. Thus, miniſters who are not reſtrained by the influence of virtuous principles, not only occasion the miſery of a country while their influence laſts, but even poiſon the ſource of public felicity, by weakening, in the Monarch, his ſentiments of duty, perverting his good diſpoſitions, and diſcouraging, ſo to ſpeak, his natural virtues. Theſe views ſuggeſt another important obſervation : The Prince, after having deviated from the path of true glory, may return when he pleaſes, to the love of virtue and greatneſs. All the avenues are open to him, all hearts ready to welcome him ; we have an inclination to love and a deſire to eſteem him whom fate has placed at the head of the nation, and who appears to us inveſted with majeſty, derived from a long train of anceſtors, and crowned with the dazzling luſtre of a diadem. We adopt, with pleaſure, any interpretation which can excuſe his conduct. We impute to evil counſels the faults which he has committed ; and are eager to enter with him
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into a new contract of esteem and hope.—The case is very different with ministers; a like indulgence is not due to them, for they cannot throw the blame on others, as their actions proceed entirely from themselves. Thus, when a minister has once lost the good opinion of the public, his depravity will daily increase; because, in order to maintain his place, he is obliged to redouble his intrigues and dissimulation.

After due consideration, I am convinced, that virtuous principles in Princes, ministers, and all the powers of government in general, are the great source of the happiness of the people, and the true wisdom of empires. We are apt to despise it, because it is not of our invention; and we often give the preference to those artifices of the mind which lead us astray, because they are our own work. Perhaps these artifices may be necessary, after we have lost sight of religious morality, our sure and faithful guide,—that companion of true genius, which, like it, prefers easy and simple means. Yes, exalted virtue, like superior abilities, rejects those resources and inventions which derive not their origin from elevation of sentiment, or greatness of thought; and whilst the first obliges a statesman to respect honour, justice and truth, the latter enables him to unite these principles with the just means which strengthen authority, and with the true glory and constant success of political measures. In

short, whilst the one renders him anxious about the interests of the people, the other shows, how their happiness might insensibly produce a harmony of interests and inclinations, beyond what has been hitherto known.

If we now attend to the private happiness of Princes, we shall readily perceive, that they are in absolute need of the encouragement which religious sentiments afford. Their distinguished authority cannot but appear to them a singular privilege; they believe this power should extend to every thing, and inconsiderately seek to accelerate the moments of enjoyment. But, as they cannot change the law of nature, by thus hastily giving way to whatever attracts their imagination, they soon reduce themselves to feel the sad languor of indifference, and the oppression of apathy.

Kings, in the exercise of their moral sensations, are exposed to similar contrarieties. They are placed, from their birth, on the pinnacle of fortune, and consequently have never been led on from one prospect to another, nor known those gradations through which their subjects pass in the pursuit of vanity and ambition. Alas! they are so quickly obeyed, and their desires so soon gratified, that their appetites and inclinations cannot be renewed with sufficient rapidity, to fill up the irksome vacuities which so often recur. Soon
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would they arrive at that period, in which the future would represent only an insipid monotony, a dull uniformity of objects, were the magnificent views which Religion presents to piety obscured, and were these to be considered as fallacious illusions, unworthy of serious attention.

The numerous duties of a Prince may, no doubt, become a great source of gratification. But it is necessary, that those who need neither favour nor advancement from their fellow-creatures, but have every thing at their command, should always connect their various duties with that grand idea, which alone can constantly animate their thoughts and actions. How much would it contribute to their happiness, to place themselves sometimes, as it were, between the magnificent prospect of futurity and this world; in which they are weary of their own power! and with what fresh delight would such contemplations lead them back to the exercise of their authority! What pleasure then would a Monarch feel in that authority, the source of so much good! What delight would he thus find in imitating, more than others can, the divine beneficence,—the most pleasant and comfortable of all ideas! And what happy moments for him, while conscious of the presence of the divine and bountiful Friend of the human race, he can, in the morning, reflect on the people he is about to make happy, and in the evening on those to whom he
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has done good. What a difference between those delicious moments, whose influence the whole nation feels, and those insignificant levees, known to none but courtiers, where the Monarch only shows himself, and tastes the dull pleasure of seeing so many men cringing before his very shadow ! what a difference between these rapturous instants, and the vain parades, amidst which, dazzled by every form of adulation, he cannot distinctly perceive whether he is a Great Man, or merely a King !

It cannot be denied, that the more extensive the horizon is, which opens before Sovereigns, the more numerous are the duties presented to their reflection, and the more they will feel themselves in need of assistance from a power superior to their own strength. They are conscious of the disproportion which exists between the extent of their authority, and the means intrusted to human nature. They can only maintain their firmness, by laying hold of that mysterious pillar, erected by Religion,—by that support alone they can consider without terror, that Providence has called them to regulate and direct the destiny of an empire. By meditating with profound attention on the existence of a God, and reflecting on the influence and various relations of such a grand idea, Marcus Aurelius discovered all the extent of his duties, and felt at the same time both cou-
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rage and inclination to fulfil them. The happy and constant agreement of his actions with his principles, rendered his reign illustrious, and has made it a lasting example of morality and wisdom.

We must then conclude, That it is to virtue, supported by every sentiment which it imprints on the human heart, that we should confide the sacred deposit of public happiness. Virtue only, is always faithful and vigilant ; it, alone, needs not the excitement of praise, but, by exhibiting to their view some great example, leads men to the knowledge of all that is worthy of their admiration.



C H A P. VIII.

*Objection drawn from the Wars and Commotions
which Religious Opinions have occasioned.*

I SHALL present this objection in its full force; nor will I seek to weaken it. Every one knows, with what numerous mischiefs, during a long series of generations, we may reproach the blind and savage zeal of religious fanaticism. No one is ignorant of those multiplied acts of intolerance which have sullied the annals of history, and those scenes of discord, war, and fury, which theological controversies have excited amongst mankind. Every one may have heard of the fatal consequences which these enterprizes have brought in their train; and which even the exalted virtues of a great King * have been insufficient to justify. In short, were we to describe those sanguinary days, in which a difference in particular tenets, was followed by a sentence of proscription, and the dreadful signal of the most cruel tortures which frenzy could inflict, it would be sufficient to maintain, in all ages, a remembrance

* Louis XIV.

remembrance of the fatal abuses which have been committed in the name of the God of Peace.

Thus, enormous tyranny and ferocious enthusiasm have, at all times, afforded cause of triumph to the eager detractors of Religion. Let us examine, however, if the inferences which they wish to deduce from those errors of the human mind, are founded on reason and justice.

I need not here remark, that religious opinions have often been rather the pretext, than the true motive of the unhappy convulsions of which they, at present, appear to be the sole origin: Neither need I enumerate the various political advantages, that have proceeded from Religion, of which history has consecrated the august monuments. I shall limit this discussion to a few simple reflections; and I shall only call in *reason* to my aid.

Will it be pretended, that by reciting the various abuses of authority, we might prove the advantages of anarchy? Could we decry every species of jurisprudence, by recounting the evils which result from chicane? Should we be able to throw an odium on the sciences, by recalling all the fatal discoveries, which are owing to our researches? Would it stifle every degree of self-love and activity, were we to relate the numerous crimes which have arisen from covetousness, pride and ambition? And shall we then desire to annihilate religious sentiments, because fanaticism

ticism has sometimes made use of them to distress mankind? These questions are similar, and should be all resolved in the same manner. Thus, in all our interests, and in all our passions, we can only distinguish *right* from *wrong* by sagacity and the light of reason; and we ought to beware of confounding mere proximity with real identity.

Fanaticism and Religion have no connection whatever, although they are too often found united. Neither the worship of the common Father of men, nor the morality of the Gospel, which dictates forbearance and goodness, can inspire the spirit of persecution. It must be attributed to blind madness, like the other errors and crimes which dishonour humanity. But since the present excesses to which men abandon themselves, do not lead us to consider as a misfortune, all those sentiments of which the criminal passions are only the extreme, Why would we refuse Religion the gratitude which is its due, because sometimes it has given birth to hatred, and unhappy divisions? We should rather remark, that intolerant zeal is, of all the errors of the human mind, the one on which the progress of knowledge appears to have had the greatest influence. In fact, whilst fanaticism, gradually weakened, seems now fast verging towards its decline, the common disorderly passions of ambition, love of wealth, and thirst of pleasure, remain

main in their full force. But what sentiment, what predominant idea, has a greater claim to pardon for its mistakes than devotion? By what an infinite number of benefits does Religion compensate the abuses which result from false interpretations of its precepts! We have already shown that men owe to this spirit, the stability of public order, and the firm principles of justice: It procures to the indigent, the succour of charity,—to virtue its encouragement,—to distressed innocence its only refuge,—and to sensibility its best and dearest hopes. Yes, the pure spirit of Religion surrounds us, as it were, on every side. It is the charm of solitude,—the band of society, and the strengthener of our intimate affections. It lives in us,—it animates all around us,—and carries our hopes beyond our present existence. Shall we then calumniate it? Shall we endeavour to destroy it, on recollecting the tyrannic opinions of a few Priests and Sovereigns, whose principles and conduct we now detest?

Again, I will ask, Why men would denounce a sentence of reprobation against religious opinions, and give as a reason, that they have been the origin of many ancient wars; while they never venture to contest the importance of commerce, though rivers of blood have often been shed for a trifling advantage of this kind? Can those to whom we may address this question, be
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so mistaken in their judgment, as to compare a few pecuniary advantages, which one nation enjoys only at the expence of another, with those blessings which are as precious as they are universal, and of which Religion is the origin and support?

In short, the most frivolous of all the arguments that are employed to attack religious opinions, are those derived from certain errors and faults, of which the present age affords no example. Would we, whilst a superb edifice stood firm on its foundation, be persuaded to level it with the ground, on hearing a recital of all the accidents its erection had occasioned?

Let us then look back with regret, on that period of history, in which Religion was made the pretext of war and cruelty; and let us oppose to that spirit of intolerance, and those sanguinary scenes, all the force of our reason, and all the instructions of that Religion itself, by which they pretend to be guided in their blind zeal. But, far from laying aside the respect we owe to those salutary opinions which men have abused, Let us take the advantage of experience, as a new defence against the deviations of our imagination, and the fallies of our passions*.

C H A P.

* I might have enlarged this chapter; but I intend to make some general reflections on intolerance, in another part of this work.

C H A P. IX.

Another Objection examined. The Sabbath.

IT is not my intention to discuss the various opinions which have been advanced with regard to particular parts of public worship; nor do I think it necessary to enter into the difficulties opposed to some dogmatic notions, which may be thought essential by some, and considered as indifferent by others. I mean not to compose a treatise of controversial theology; much less do I wish to oppose the doctrines of one Church to those of another. All of them connect morality with the commands of a Supreme Being: All of them consider public worship as the respectful expression of love and gratitude towards the Sovereign Author of Nature. Therefore, those who may think, that they perceive some defects in the system or form of worship adopted in a nation, ought not to urge that as an objection against the utility of Religious Opinions; since the reflections which have been here made on the Importance of these Opinions, may be applied equally to the doctrines of all countries, and the principles of every sect.

I shall, then, notice only one difficulty, which equally concerns all the different Religions of Europe.

The establishment of public worship, and the necessity of setting apart, at least, one day every week, occasions, say the opposers of Religion, a too frequent suspension of labour; and this injures the state, by diminishing the resources of the people.

It may be first observed, that such an objection appears very trivial, if compared with the great advantages which men derive from religious principles. An increase of wealth can never stand in competition with order, morality, and happiness. But I will further endeavour to prove, That a day of rest, devoted to public worship, cannot injure the political strength of a country; and that, so far from being contrary to the interests of the people, it protects and favours them. Such interests ever hold the first place in my heart; and I shall, therefore, begin by demonstrating, in a few words, the truth of this last proposition.

It would be a mistake to think, that in a given space of time, such men as are, by their lot, constrained to live by the labour of their hands, might better their situation, were they not obliged, by the precepts of Religion, to rest from labour one day in every week.

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The more clearly to perceive this truth, let us examine what is the present standard by which the rate of wages is fixed : It consists not in an exact proportion between labour and its reward. Indeed, were we to consult only reason and equity, I believe no one would venture to say, that the most scanty necessities of life, are the just price of fatiguing and painful labour, which commences at the dawn, and ends not till the setting of the sun ; nor would any one maintain, that in the midst of his enjoyments, and in the bosom of luxurious idleness, the rich man ought not to grant any other recompense to those who sacrifice their time and strength, to increase his revenue, and multiply his enjoyments. The wages of the commonalty have not then been fixed by principles of reasoning and reflection : They seem to depend on a contract of force and restraint,—a yoke imposed by the powerful, to which the weak must submit. Soon would the possessor of a vast domain see all his riches vanish, did not industrious labourers annually cultivate his fields; and bear into his storehouse the fruits of their toil. But as the number of men without property is immense, their own assent, and the pressing necessity they feel of labouring for a subsistence, oblige them to receive the law from him who can, in the bosom of ease, wait quietly for their services. And it results from this habitual dependence of the poor on the rich,

that the wages of the labourers are constantly reduced to the most scanty allowance, that is to say, what is barely sufficient to satisfy, from day to day, their indispensable wants.

This system being settled, if it were possible, that, by a revolution in our nature, men could live and preserve their strength, without allotting every day some hours to repose and sleep, it is certain beyond doubt, that the work of twenty hours, would be required for the same wages now granted for that of twelve.

Now, by a similar hypothesis, were a revolution of morals to be introduced, and were labourers permitted to work on the seventh day; it is certain, that in a little time, the labour of the seven days would be required of them, at the same rate now paid for that of six. And this reduction to the standard would take place by the gradual diminution of the daily wages. That class of society, so attentive to its own interest, which has regulated the present wages, not according to reason and equity, but according to the necessities of the labourers, would quickly discern, that when a day more was paid for, the people could bear a diminution of the seventh part of their wages, and still remain in their former state. Thus, though before the change had thoroughly taken place, all those who live by labour, would think they had acquired a new resource, yet they would very soon find themselves

selves reduced to their former condition: For the relations of social order, are subjected to laws, similar, in some respects, to those which establish an equilibrium in nature, where every thing is combined, ranked or placed according to the immutable law of the proportion of force.

Thus, men without property, after being for some time deceived, would at last find that they had only got an increase of work by the abolition of the Sabbath. As this truth, however, does not naturally appear evident to the mind, we ought to consider that Religion has done an essential service, in having secured the most numerous class of men from a degree of oppression, on which they would have blindly rushed, if they had been at liberty to make a choice.

The daily labour of men of that class, often surpasses the reasonable measure of their strength, and hastens the days of decrepitude. It was therefore absolutely necessary, that the customary course of these labours should be for a time suspended: But as the people, pressed by wants of every kind, are ready to be seduced by the slightest appearance of advantage, it was also necessary to their happiness, that the interruption of their fatigues, being fixed by a religious duty, should not appear to them the voluntary sacrifice of fortune, and should not become the cause of regret. In short, they are pleased when they think of those days of rest, which pro-

duce a little alteration in their manner of living. That alteration is requisite to preserve them from being oppressed by a continual train and repetition of the same occupations. Thus, were it to be artfully insinuated, that the people are not so comfortable on the Sabbath, as during the other days of the week, it would be at least true, that the latter are softened by the expectation of the former; but there are people so very wretched, and so bounded in their desires, that the most trifling variety is a substitute for hope. In my opinion, it must cheer the hearts of the common people, to think of their being once a-week dressed like their superiors; when they are absolute masters of their time, and can thus sometimes say,—I also am free*.

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* These various reflections are very necessary in the place where I live, since labourers have, of late, been allowed to work at Paris on Sunday. We see this publicly practised at the new bridge now building over the Seine; as if a work of mere convenience were in such haste, that the laws should be dispensed with to accelerate its execution. The workmen, say some people, are glad to gain a day every week:—Undoubtedly, while they only see the present instant, they have reason to think so; but it is the duty of Government, to consider, in a more comprehensive manner, the interest of that part of society, whose views are always very narrow and imperfect. The Church should also examine, whether the sudden alteration of so ancient a practice, may not give rise to an idea, that the spirit of Religion is on the decline. The nations where this spirit is best preserved, have always the greatest regard to the Sabbath.

I come now to examine the second proposition which I have mentioned.

You have clearly shewn, some will say, that an increase of working days, would occasion a reduction of the price of labour; we are therefore entitled to ask, If this result would not favour commerce, and contribute, in some respect, to increase the political strength of the nation? We may, no doubt, consider the diminution of the reward of industry, under this point of view; but political strength being always a relative idea, and derived from a comparison with other states; this strength can never be augmented or diminished by a circumstance common to all the countries of Europe. Were any nation, from barbarous ambition, to abolish the day of rest established by Religion, that abolition might probably procure it a degree of superiority, if it was the only country which had adopted such a change; but as soon as other Sovereigns followed the example, the ancient proportions, which regulate the commercial interests of nations, would again take place. However, such arguments ought to convince us, that some countries, where the intervals of inaction occur oftener, are necessarily under a political disadvantage, with regard to others, where Sunday, and a few solemn feasts, are the only days of rest prescribed by government.

We may conclude from these observations, that instead of finding fault with Religion for appointing a day of rest, devoted every week to public worship, we ought to acknowledge with pleasure, that such an institution is an act of benevolence, extended to the most numerous class of inhabitants of the earth, the most deserving our consideration and protection ;—from whom we require so much, and to whom we return so little ;—that unfortunate class, of whose youth and manhood the rich avail themselves, but whom they too often abandon at that period, when, their strength being exhausted, they can only employ prayers and tears, as a defence against wretchedness.



C H A P. X.

Observation on a particular Circumstance of Public Worship.

IT is not enough, that the rulers of a nation be persuaded of the influence of religious sentiments on the morals and happiness of men; they ought to use proper means, to maintain their salutary operation; and of course, every part of public worship becomes of the greatest importance. Educated in a religion, thought by some to approach nearer the original principles of Christianity, but which has adopted several doctrines, by no means consonant with the Catholic faith, it would be imprudent for me to enter on any of the points in which the two Churches differ. Were I to do so, no good could result from it, so much are we disposed to refer to early prejudices, those ideas which are connected with our intimate feelings and sentiments. We wish to judge from a general glance; and though this method indulges our indolence, it, often leads us aside from the truth. I am of
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opinion, however, that the minds of the people are sufficiently enlightened, to permit me to advise the Rulers of both Church and State, to examine attentively, If it is not full time to make more use of the vulgar tongue ; and, If we are not warned, by the present depravity of morals, to alter the manner of performing divine service in this respect.

It is only during an interval of the grand mass, that the priest addresses to the country people, some words of exhortation in their own language. It was natural to consider this as the moment most proper to dispose the mind to respect and attention. But perhaps the pomp of an august ceremony, by strongly attracting the imagination, withdraws the attention of the ignorant rabble from the importance of other parts of divine worship. And it frequently happens, in country places, that many people go out of church during the sermon, and return at the moment of consecration.

I think that public prayers should always be in the vulgar tongue ; and they might easily be rendered interesting and affecting ; for no kind of religious discourse can more sympathise with human weakness ; and as, by prayer, our wants and anxieties raise us towards the Supreme Being, we might thus make choice of the best of all bands to win the multitude.

I must observe also, that part of the country people, at certain seasons of the year, are only present at early mas^s*, and then they are mere onlookers at a religious ceremony. And if the practice and liberty of working on Sunday were more extended, the inhabitants of the country, being entirely confined to the first mas^s, would hear neither prayers nor instructive discourses in their own language, during the whole year.

Certainly some alteration ought to be made in these religious institutions, in order to make them serve more effectually to support morality, and comfort the most numerous class of the human race. Country people, whose labour produces our wealth, ought to be taken care of with paternal anxiety. And since they are less exposed to those disorderly passions, which are so prevalent in a metropolis,—since mild and prudent means suffice to maintain them in the habit of duty,—both the Rulers of Church and State are, in some measure, answerable for the corruption of their manners and dispositions.

* This mas^s is commonly called *Low Mas^s*.



C H A P. XI.

*That the idea of the existence of a God is, alone,
a sufficient support of Morality.*

HAVING shown that morality needs a supernatural support, it may be expected that I should explain the intimate relation which unites Religion with the observance of order, and the love of virtue. In order to investigate this important truth, I shall follow that simple and natural train of sentiments, which guide the human mind in every climate and country under heaven.

It is evident, that all moral legislation, and the entire system of our duties, may be easily united to the simple belief of a God.

How insignificant would the universe have appeared, notwithstanding its magnificence and immensity, had not its Supreme Author peopled it with intelligent beings, capable of contemplating so many wonders, and of deriving happiness from them? But the faculties with which we are endowed,—our consciousness of possessing them,

them, and our liberty to act, all announce to us, that we are united to a grand combination, and we have a part to perform on the vast stage of the world.

A small degree of reason, resembling the instinct of inferior animals, would have been sufficient for enabling us to take care of the body, and for concentrating us in ourselves: More would have been unnecessary for such a narrow purpose. Thus, when I consider that the mind is susceptible of continual improvement,—when I see that men enjoy the power of assisting each other, and of communicating their ideas,—when I fix my attention on our social dispositions, and on all the relative qualities which compose our nature; I cannot help thinking, that we have a plan of conduct to follow towards others, and that, in our journey through life, we must be circumspect, having many obstacles to conquer, as well as sacrifices to make, and obligations to fulfil.

Men seem, then, to be led on to morality by the best gifts of nature, and by all the noblest principles of their constitution. But it is worthy of our notice, as a singular concurrence, that their wants and their weaknesses are so directed as to contribute to the very same end.

What emotions do I feel, when I reflect on the imperious laws to which I am at present obliged to submit, and, at the same time, recollect the
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the grandeur and magnificence which I have witnessed? Struck with this contrast, I continually raise my soul towards the Sovereign Director of events; and, urged by instinct, as well as by rational sentiments, I address my prayers to Him alone. The unfortunate, when they observe how little would be sufficient to guard them from impending dangers, and relieve them from present pain, and when they contemplate so many wonders beyond their comprehension, are led to implore the commiseration of Him whose infinite power is every where evident. But shall I imagine that the Supreme Being is only beneficent to me, and that I alone am worthy of his notice and protection? While mankind, my fellow creatures, partake of the same prospects and hopes with me, how shall I venture to seek protection from those evils which I myself would do to others? How shall I solicit the blessing of Heaven on my undertakings, whilst I endeavour unjustly to thwart the prosperity of others? How should I wish to be set free from the yoke which oppresses me, whilst I exercise the most tyrannical insolence towards my inferiors? Thus present discontent,—the fear of futurity,—anxiety caused by misfortunes, and whatever sentiments tend to disturb social order, assume another character, or are at least sensibly modified, when men are led by their sufferings to elevate their wishes to God,

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but dare not do it with a heart polluted with criminal intentions.

Besides *Prayer*, there is another way of communication with the Supreme Being, which leads to Moral Virtue : It is the sentiment of *Gratitude*. A man who is convinced of the existence of an Infinite Sovereign Power, and who gladly connects his success and happiness with the divine protection, feels, at the same time, a desire to express his gratitude. Unable to do any thing for Him who bestows all, he endeavours to form an idea of the perfections of the Supreme Being, in order to comprehend the system of conduct most conformable to the attributes of that All Perfect Model. What thoughts, what emotions, at once agitate our souls, when we contemplate the universe ! We view with the deepest admiration, that magnificent harmony, which is the incomprehensible result of an innumerable multitude of various powers and qualities. Struck with this great whole, in which we perceive an agreement so perfect, we cannot avoid considering the order we discover, as a distinct mark of the wisdom and design of the Creator : Neither can we doubt that we render Him due homage, when we make use of the free intelligence with which he has endowed us. Then, in modelling the structure of society, a work which has been entrusted to us, we should endeavour to take into view, those ideas of wisdom

dom and proportion, of which all nature exhibits a great example : Then, in establishing the relations which unite mankind, we should carefully study the laws of moral order; and we would find them all founded on that reciprocation of duties, which subjects all our jarring personal interests to a regular movement. In short, the idea of a God, Creator, Regenerator, and Preserver of the universe by invariable laws, and by a succession of the same causes and effects, seems to point out a universal morality,—which, like the unknown springs which actuate the natural world, may be, as it were, the necessary tie of this succession of intelligent beings, who, always possessed of the same passions, pass and repass on the earth,—to seek after, or to shun,—to assist, or to hurt each other, according to the degree of their social union, and according to the wisdom or impropriety of the principles which direct their opinions.

The attentive study of human nature ought to confirm us in the sentiments here advanced. When we consider the prodigious difference which exists among the minds and characters of men, and when we reflect how far this difference may be carried, by the degree of improvement of which some are susceptible,—we cannot contemplate such a constitution, without being induced to think that the counterpoise of these extraordinary means of force and usurpation must
proceed

proceed from reason,—from that singular authority which alone can establish among mankind the relations of justice and propriety, and render them capable of maintaining an equilibrium amidst so many disparities. Thus, respect for morality seems evidently to be a part of the general plan and primitive idea of the Supreme Disposer of the universe. What happiness then must we find in a persuasion, that the cultivation of virtue, and the observance of order, afford the means of pleasing our Divine Benefactor ! It is by that alone, we can hope to concur, however feebly, in the execution of his grand designs. Surrounded with so many blessings, and so many signs of a particular protection, How highly ought we to value this means of communication with the Sovereign Author of our existence ? Thus then, the homage of gratitude and adoration which we render to the Deity, leads us to respect the laws of morality ; and this sentiment, in its turn, continually maintains in our minds, the idea of a Supreme Being.

Independent of the reflections which have been just offered, morality, considered in all its extent, requires to be strengthened by that disposition of the soul, which interests us in the happiness of others ; and it is in one of the most glorious perfections of the Deity, that we find the first model of this precious sentiment. We must either assert that our existence proceeds from no

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cause, or admit that we owe it to the *goodness* of a Supreme Being. Life, some will say, is only a mixture of pains and pleasures : But we ought candidly to allow, that those moments, in which life appears no benefit, do very seldom occur. In Youth, that period which so many never surpass, existence is considered as the greatest of all blessings. The other seasons of life offer pleasures, which, though less animated, agree better with the progress of our understanding, and the increase of our experience.

The opposers of Religion, in order to divert us of gratitude, sometimes ask, Who would accept of life, on condition of running over the same career a second time, and returning step by step, in the same track? But in answering this question, we cannot set a just value on the benefits which we have received ; for when we take a retrospective view of life, we see it stripped of its two principal ornaments, *curiosity* and *hope*. It was not, however, in this state, that it was received and enjoyed by us.

Perhaps, our fancy cannot replace us in that situation where imagination constituted our pleasure ; its effect is too slight to make an impression on the memory. But still we may be convinced that a degree of happiness is attached to our existence, because we look forward with terror to the moment when we shall be forced to renounce it. Now, as this happiness is composed

posed not only of present pleasures, but also of all those which we anticipate, we cannot judge properly of the value of life, when this future prospect is only presented to us under the form of the past : For we cannot duly appreciate, in our languishing recollection, that which we loved in the moment of hope.

Physical evils are neither the end, nor the condition of our nature : They are accidental to it. The happiness of infancy, which displays the work of the Deity in its primitive purity, evidently points out the goodness of a Supreme Being ; and how can we doubt, that we owe our origin to a benevolent design, since a desire of happiness has been given us, to serve as the motive of all our actions ? Alas ! we would have had a better opinion of life, had we not corrupted its pleasures by artificial sentiments, which we have substituted instead of nature,—had we not overlooked so many realities, and devoted ourselves to the pursuits of pride and vanity ; had we not, instead of contributing to each others happiness, been principally occupied in making others submit to us ! Some troubles, no doubt, are blended with our wondrous existence ; but from what a multitude of others are we exempted ! Let us then cherish those exalted sentiments which elevate the mind, and fortify us against envy and discontent.

It is only from the consideration of detached events, and in peculiar circumstances, that we can raise any doubts about the goodness of God ; but his universal goodness is ever discoverable, when we connect the particulars which give us pain, with that great whole of which they are a part. We then find that the misfortunes with which we are so much offended, are a simple appendage to a system, where all the characters of a beneficent intelligence may be evidently traced. We ought, therefore, carefully to look into the intentions of the Author of Nature, in this vast structure, in which His power and wisdom are every where displayed ; and such contemplations will always lead us to sentiments of respect and gratitude. This simple idea is very extensive in its application. Above all, it affords us consolation under the afflictions incident to human life. He who thinks in this manner, can say to himself : ‘ The transitory evil to which I am subjected, is perhaps one of the inevitable effects of this universal harmony,—the most noble and the most extensive of all conceptions. Thus, in the moments when I bewail my fate, I ought not to think myself forsaken ; I ought not to accuse Him, whose infinite wisdom is present to my view,—Him, whose general laws I have so often admired, as the certain expression of real goodness.’

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It is in vain, some will say, to call our attention to these considerations: We only remark, that our happiness in this world, is, at least, greatly inferior to the degree of felicity which our imagination can easily represent; and we cannot perceive, in such an arrangement, that union of perfections, which ought to be the attribute of a Supreme Being.

This objection is presented under various forms by the opposers of Religion: From it they have drawn consequences, sometimes against the goodness of God, and sometimes against his power, his wisdom and justice. It would be necessary, in order to resolve such difficulties, that we should be capable to form an idea of the perfections of an infinite Being: But in all our attempts, we only carry to the extreme, all the qualities which are within the reach of our conception; but perfection, in the works of the Creator, probably consists in a kind of gradation and harmony, the secret of which we can neither comprehend nor penetrate. We ought also to be very cautious of our procedure, while we endeavour to judge of the essence of the Deity; because, in confining ourselves solely to reconcile his sovereign power with his perfect goodness, we should be unable to fix the boundary where these two properties will be in an equilibrium: For after having exhausted every supposition, we might still ask, Why the number of animated beings

susceptible of happiness, is not more extended? Why every grain of sand is not one of those beings? or in short, Why each grain does not contain a number of such beings, equal to that infinite divisibility, of which we can form an idea? Thus, in arguing on infinite power, passing from one extreme to another, the least inanimated particle of matter, the least void in nature, would appear a boundary to the goodness of the Supreme Being. We thus see, how far we might wander, were we to abandon the simple principles of common sense, in order to follow the vague excursions of metaphysical researches.

Were no other proof to be found, I think that the *power* of God would be sufficient to demonstrate his *goodness*: For this power informs us every instant, that if the supreme Ruler of the world had intended that animated beings should be miserable, he would have had means as rapid as numerous to fulfil this intention. He needed not to have created worlds, and clothed them with such beauty and magnificence: A terrific gulph, and eternal darkness, would have been sufficient to crowd together those unfortunate beings, and make them feel their misery. Let us fly from those gloomy thoughts, and let us cherish in our hearts, a just emotion of gratitude. Thus we shall be eager to render homage to that indelible character of love and goodness, which we see stamped on all nature. An unknown power
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opens our eyes to the light, and permits us to view the wonders of the universe: It awakens in us those delightful sensations, which first make us feel the charm of life: It enriches us with that intellectual gift, which, as it were, assembles around us past ages and the time to come: It confers on us, at an early period, an empire, by investing us with these two sublime faculties, *will* and *liberty*. In short, it renders us sensible to the refined pleasure of loving and being beloved; and when, by the effect of a general plan which surpasses our comprehension, it scatters here and there some troubles in the path of life, it seems willing to soften them, by showing us the future through the enchanting veil of imagination and hope. Could it then be with indifference, and without real goodness, that this wonderful system has been conceived, and preserved by so many superb demonstrations of wisdom and power? What should we be in the sight of the ETERNAL, if he did not love us? We have not adorned his majestic universe, nor lent to the dawn its magnificent colours: Neither have we clothed the earth with beautiful verdure, nor bid the celestial bodies revolve in the immense expanse: We have not been admitted to the counsels of the Almighty, nor aided him by our wisdom;—we should thus be nothing in His eyes, were He indifferent to our gratitude,

and were He to take no pleasure in the happiness of His creatures.

Were we even to turn our attention from so many striking proofs of the goodness of God,—were they to be effaced from our memory, we should still find in the recesses of our heart, sufficient evidence of this comfortable truth : We should perceive that we ourselves are good and affectionate when not perverted by passion ; and we should be led to think, that such an inclination in beings who have received every thing from their Creator, and can do nothing of themselves, must necessarily be the seal of a Divine Author. In order to exalt this sentiment, we must refer it continually to the idea of a Supreme Being : For there is, doubtless, a correspondence, and, as it were, a reflected resemblance, between our virtue, and the perfection of Him who is the origin of all that is good. Indeed, if we resist not our natural emotions, we shall perceive, in those very perfections, every thing that is necessary to excite us to worship and adoration ; and, above all, whatever is needful to direct our moral conduct and principles.

I come now to examine some important objections ; for why should I fear to present them ? Every prejudice in favour of peculiar systems or opinions ought to be laid aside, in treating a subject on which so many have expatiated, and which is so highly interesting to the whole human

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man race. It is, however, allowable, in our search after truth, that we desire earnestly to find it united to such sentiments as constitute our happiness as individuals, and to those principles which are the foundation of public order.

We admit, some may say, that there are many perfections peculiar to the Supreme Being, the study and knowledge of which ought to be the support of the laws of morality ; but one of the essential properties of the divine essence overturns the whole structure,—to wit, infinite *prescience*. For as God has a previous knowledge of what we are to do, it follows that all our actions are previously determined ; and thus, man cannot be free. If such be his condition, he deserves neither praise nor censure : He has no means of pleasing or displeasing the Supreme Being ; and the ideas of good and evil, of virtue and vice, are absolutely chimerical. I shall at once make a very simple reply to this objection, but a very decisive one. If, contrary to every evidence, you should persuade me, that there is an absolute contradiction between the liberty of man and the prescience of the Deity, yet the nature and extent of that prescience remain very dubious : For, being forced to choose, I should rather mistrust the judgment of my own mind, than an opinion founded on internal conviction. This intimate persuasion will render it ever impossible to convince men that they are not free.

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We can only attempt to overturn this belief by reasoning : But reason being the commencement of art, and founded on a combination of reflections, this exterior means can never have power to eradicate a sentiment that appears to be the first of which we are conscious.

We soon arrive at the limits of our faculties, in the efforts which we make to acquire a just idea of the divine prescience. We can very well suppose, that God foresees with certainty, things about which we only conjecture indistinctly ; and by enlarging, without end, the boundaries opposed to our mind, we can proportion, in our imagination, the knowledge of the Creator to the immensity of space, and to the infinity of time : But beyond these common and vague ideas we shall wander in all our speculations. How is it possible that we, who know not even the nature of our own souls, should be able to determine the nature of divine prescience ? How can we know if this prescience be the effect of a rapid calculation of Him, who embraces, at one glance, the relations and effects of every moral and natural cause ? How can we discern whether this prescience in an Infinite Being is distinct from simple knowledge ? How can we know, whether that Being, by a property beyond our conception, does not at once exist before and after events ;—whether He is not, as
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it were, the intellectual Time,—before whose eternal and unchangeable existence our divisions of years and ages, totally disappear?

It is evident from these considerations, that, on account of our extreme ignorance, we cannot accurately define divine prescience. We must, therefore, examine whether this prescience, considered in a general manner, is incompatible with the liberty of man.

This opinion, I think, should not be adopted. Prescience does not determine future events: For the mere knowledge of the future, makes not the future. Prescience never can necessitate the actions of men; because it does not change the natural order of things. But all future events are fixed, whether foreseen or not: For constraint and liberty conduct equally to a positive term. Thus, all that will happen, is as immutable as that which is past; since the present was the future of yesterday, and will be to-morrow the past. It is then certain, abstractedly, that an event, whether foreseen or not, will take place some time. But if liberty be not averfe to this inevitable certainty, How does it become so, because there exists a Being who is acquainted previously with the precise nature of events? We may then justly conclude, that the knowledge of the future is no more an obstruction to liberty, than the remembrance of the past; and prophecies, like histories, are only recitals, whose place

place is not the same in the order of time; but having no influence on events, they cannot constrain the will, enslave the sentiments, nor subject man to the law of necessity.

It is, however, confessed, that if prescience were founded on the possibility of calculating the actions of men, like the movements of an organized machine, liberty could not exist. But then it would not be prescience which opposed our liberty,—it would be our nature, as mere automata: For with such a constitution we should be without liberty, were the Supreme Being even to have no knowledge of futurity.

Some philosophers vainly endeavour to convince us, that we are not free, by representing that we necessarily submit to the impulse of various exterior objects; comprehending, among those objects, every thing that is subtle in moral ideas, and uniting them under the general name of *motives*; and afterwards giving to these motives a physical force, which they pretend we are bound to obey. But in order to be free, is it necessary, that we should act without motives? Then would man be evidently a piece of mechanism. It is certain, that we are determined in all our actions by reason, taste, or some cause of preference. But it is the mind which lays hold of these various considerations, and which weighs, compares and modifies them. The mind listens to the counsels of virtue, and replies to the language

guage of our passions. In order to obtain light, the mind borrows from the memory the succours of experience. The mind thus prepares, composes and improves all those things which we term motives; and in consequence of this intellectual labour, we determine our mode of action. There is too much order, unity and harmony in our thoughts, to allow us for a moment, to imagine that they are the mere effect of the exterior objects, the ideas of which are, without any regular arrangement, impressed on our brain. Until we are made acquainted with the doctrines of chaos, we should firmly believe that there exists every where the same unity and order. That there is a Power capable of reassembling every thing that is scattered, and uniting to one end all that is seemingly mixed without design.

While we are impelled to believe, that there is a master or ruler over our perceptions, and while we feel its influence, How is it possible to doubt, that it is our mind which acts? But by breaking loose from its operations, we are stripped of our liberty, and suppose, at last, that our will is the necessary consequence of exterior objects; as if it were the colours, and not the painter, that produced the picture. However, if we secure our mind from that slavery to which some wish to reduce it, our actions will no longer
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be merely subservient to irresistible emotions :
For liberty of thought sets us entirely free.

..We ought to consider our senses as messengers, which bring to our mind new subjects of reflection : But they are so far subordinate to the sublime part of our existence, that they act only under its direction. Sometimes the ruling principle commands them to bring representations of the beauties of nature,—to examine assiduously the registers of the human mind,—to take the ruler and compass, and render an exact account of the things it desires to know with precision. Sometimes it teaches them how to acquire more power; and when it wishes to address posterity, it orders them to perpetuate in indelible characters, all that it has maturely combined,—all that it has discovered,—and all it hopes to add to the treasures of our knowledge. Is not then the soul the master, rather than the slave of our senses, or the blind sport of their caprice?

There is another observation, that appears a contrast to the absolute empire which some wish to grant to exterior objects over the powers of the soul. It is, That amid the silence of meditation, the action of our mind is not at all interrupted. We experience, that we have the power of recalling past ideas ; and that we can connect those ideas with the prospect of the future, and with the various imaginary circumstances our fancy may suggest. Our reflection is then
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the *result*, but not the *work* of those exterior objects we are acquainted with. These two words, *work* and *result*, which, in some acceptations, have a great resemblance, have here very different meanings. By confounding them, some persons have endeavoured to raise an objection against the existence of our liberty.—We cannot form any judgment without previously discussing every argument proper to throw light on the subject: The *result* of such enquiries determines our will; but these enquiries themselves are the *work* of our mind.

In short, all the degrees which lead to the end of our intellectual researches, are simple antecedents, and not absolute motives. There is, in the operations of our mind, as in every thing subject to change, a train of causes and effects; but this concatenation does not characterise necessity more than liberty.

By thus restoring to the soul, its original dignity, is it not evident, that we approach nearer to nature, than by adopting those systems and explications which assimilate our intellectual faculties to the regular vibrations of a pendulum? or would it be better to compare them to those little balls that fly out of their niches, to strike our brain, which, by its various ramifications, produces a certain shock that impels our will? In all this, I only discover puerile figures, put in the place of those terms, that indicate, at least,
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by their abstraction, the indefinite extent, and the important nature of the ideas which they represent. It is easy to call a *motive*, a little moving ball; and to call *uncertainty* or *repentance*, the combat of two of these little balls, till the arrival of a third forms a determination. It is easy to say, that the concurrence of many such balls towards the same point, excites in us an impetuous passion. But who sees not, that, after having endeavoured to debase the functions of the mind by these wretched comparisons, the difficulty remains undiminished?

Since our researches and meditations on the existence and nature of our liberty present us only with impenetrable clouds and obscurity, Is it not strange, that amidst this darkness, we should reject all the information of our instinctive sentiments, which alone can clearly explain every thing that we seek in vain to discover by other means? What would we say of a man born blind, who would not be directed by the voice? How much better are we instructed in the constitution of our nature by our feelings, than by metaphysical arguments! Our feelings seem to be blended with the original essence of the soul; and we ought to consider them, in some measure, as a sally of that incomprehensible part of our nature, whose mysteries we cannot penetrate. Such instruction, which comes to us from a divine hand, is more deserving of confidence

dence than the interpretation of men. There are secrets which philosophers try in vain to explain ; all their endeavours are ineffectual to represent by comparison, that which is peculiar, and without resemblance.

One would think that nature, aware of the false reasoning which might mislead us, had purposely bestowed an inward conviction of our free will, by composing our natural life of two distinct movements : One depending on a necessity, whose laws we are not acquainted with, and cannot oppose ; the other entirely subject to the government of our reason. Such a comparison would be sufficient to convince us, if we sought merely for the truth.

Spinoza, in order to make us distrust the information we derive from our intuitive perceptions, said, That were a weathercock, while it is the mere playing of the winds, capable of volition in its various motions, it might, for that reason, imagine that it was the cause of its own movement. What signifies such an argument, unless it were to prove, that it is possible to suppose a fiction so perfect, that it might seem equivalent to a reality ? But, let me ask, By what strange and unaccountable design of an Intelligent Being, or even, by what fortuitous coincidence in blind nature, is it, That man comes to have his *will* and *actions*, at every moment, precisely conformable, if no real correspondence exists between them ?

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We may oppose another argument to the hypothesis of Spinoza, by which it is effectually overturned; that is, If on the one hand, the most apparent liberty can be supposed to be only an illusion, by a particular concurrence of our will with an ordained action, it is, on the other hand, incontestible, that were we only endeavouring to suppose the existence, or simple possibility, of a free will, we could not form an idea of it, different from that which we actually enjoy. Even the liberty of God himself does not appear to our thoughts under any other form. It is essential to remark, That while we contemplate our faculties, we can imagine, with ease, a superior degree of intelligence, of knowledge, of memory, of foresight, and of every other property of our understanding. Our *liberty* is the only circumstance of our nature, to which imagination can add nothing.

I shall not pursue all the subtle arguments that have been advanced on the subject of liberty: Because I wish to be universally useful, and I do not address myself to some men, but to all. I shall therefore always dwell on such principal reflections as appear to me sufficient to influence the opinion of those who possess a sound understanding, and have a tendency to fix the attention on the important truths, which are the surest foundation of public happiness. Vanity and ostentation may induce us to follow a question

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question to its utmost limits, and to delight in spinning it out with much nicety; for vanity, when applied to deep investigations, often becomes, itself, the greatest subtlety.

LET us now examine other arguments used to combat those principles which we have endeavoured to establish. Some will say, ‘In vain do we attempt to prove that the belief of the existence of a God is a sufficient support to the laws of morality: All this system will fall to pieces, if we are not informed, at the same time, in what manner this God rewards and punishes.’

I shall at first observe, that such an objection can never make a deep impression, unless it be connected in our minds with some doubt of the existence of a Supreme Being;—a question of which I shall not yet treat. For, supposing an internal conviction of this great truth, and that the idea of a God is present to our thoughts in all its force, I ask, Whether, in order to please Him, we should require to know precisely the period when we could perceive distinct signs of His approbation and beneficence? I also ask, Whether, to avoid incurring His displeasure, it would be equally necessary for us to know how, and in what manner, He would punish us? Certainly not: For, on taking a comprehensive view of the rewards and punishments that may

proceed from a Supreme Being,—struck with His grandeur, and astonished by His power, the awful thought of infinity would obtrude; and this tremendous idea would regulate our sentiments, and fix the principles of our conduct. We should beware how we propose conditions to Him who has brought us from nothing; and we should wait with respect, for the moment, when, in His profound wisdom, He may think proper to make us better acquainted with His attributes. One man may say to another, Secure me the reward of my services, I demand it on such a day, at such an hour. They barter things of equal value, and they exercise this traffic during a short space of time; but in the intercourse of man with the Deity, what an interval! what infinite disparity!—The creature and the Creator,—the offspring of dust and the Source of Life,—a short moment and Eternity,—an imperceptible atom and the Infinite Being, who fills the whole Universe! Our understanding is overpowered by this contrast. How then should we adapt to such disproportions, the rules and notions which we have introduced into our narrow transactions and trivial concerns? You require, that in order to feel the desire of pleasing the Supreme Being, He should every moment bestow gifts on those, who by their sentiments and actions appear worthy of His goodness: And to inspire the fear of offending Him, you wish
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that without delay, He would let his vengeance crush the wicked. Certainly you would be scrupulous observers of His will on such conditions; for less stable hopes and fears detain you fervilely near a Monarch: And I may venture to say, that you would be equally attentive to the Ruler of the World; if, in order to reward or punish you, He were to alter the laws of nature.

‘ But we do not see,’ you may add, ‘ that God ‘ interferes in any manner to direct things here ‘ below :’—You do not see it ! but do you more clearly discover the power which gives life and motion to all nature ? It is not because such a power does not exist, but because it is above the reach of your mind. What shall we say to the man who rejects the belief of a God ? Without that guide all our ideas are wandering, and have no other connection but that of a bewildered imagination. But if you grant that the world had an origin,—if you suppose a God, Creator and Preserver, what arguments could you use to convince us, that that God has no relation to us : That He does not take notice of intelligent beings, and that He is thus separated from the offspring of His love and intelligence ? It may be further added, ‘ Vice is every where triumphant,—an honest man often languishes in despondency and obscurity ; and how can we reconcile this injustice with the idea of a Divine

‘ Providence?’ We may, at once, deny the assertion, which forms the basis of this reproach ; at least we may dispute the inferences that are deduced from it. These ideas of exaltation and abasement, of splendour and obscurity, are sometimes very foreign to the internal sentiments, which alone constitute happiness and misery.

For my part, I am persuaded, that if we take for a rule of comparison, not some particular situations, or some uncommon events, but the whole tenor of life, and the generality of men, we shall then find, that the most constant satisfaction attends those minds which are filled with a mild piety, firm and rational, such as the pure idea of the Deity ought to inspire. I am equally persuaded, that virtue, united to this piety, which softens every action of self-denial, is the safest guide in the path of life. Perhaps, ignorant as we are of our nature and destination, it is not our interest, that uninterrupted rewards should excite us to virtue : For if this virtue be our title and hope with God, for the present, and the time to come, we ought not to desire that it should degenerate into an evident calculation, and into a sentiment resembling convenience and selfishness. It would indeed be very difficult to give a proper definition of liberty, if, by the effect of rapid justice, a constant proportion of good and evil, accompanied every determination of our mind : We should then morally, as well

as physically, be impelled by an imperious instinct, and the merit of our actions would be entirely destroyed.

HERE, some may say, What imports our merit or demerit, if our life is only for an instant, and if nothing is to follow? The belief of the existence of a God, without a *certainty* of the immortality of our Soul, cannot impose any obligation; and we do not perceive any real connection between these two ideas.

Undoubtedly, left to our own understanding, this word *certainty* is not made for us; at least it is not applicable to our relation with the Deity, and to the judgment we form of His designs and will. We are too far removed from the Great Ruler of the universe, to comprehend His infinite designs. Those things which He has covered with a veil, we can but obscurely perceive, and those which are hid in the depths of His wisdom, we never can discover. But the more the God whom we adore is beyond our highest conceptions, the less have we a right to limit His perfections, in order to deny His power of prolonging our existence beyond the narrow circle submitted to our view; and I do not think any one can allege, that such an act of the Deity, would be more wonderful or greater, than the creation of the world, or the formation of animated beings. The habit of observing a great

wonder may weaken our astonishment, but it changes not the nature of the object itself.

It is by reflection alone, that we are enabled to reach those events, of which the future is still the depository. But since every thing around us, declares the greatness of the Supreme Being,—since the mind, in contemplation, approaches without terror the confines of infinity, why should we mistrust what that magnificent union of Omnipotence and perfect Goodness may perform in favour of man? Why reject, as an absurd confidence, the idea of another existence? We see, without astonishment, the feeble chrysalis burst through its tomb, and appear under a new form. We cannot by anticipation witness the perpetuity of our own intelligence; but its vast extent would appear to us, were we not familiarized with it, a more wonderful phenomenon than its duration.

In short, Why shall I resist the belief of the continuation of my existence, since I am forced to give credit to my birth? There appears a greater distance between life and the nonentity which precedes it, than between life and its sequel, or its renewal under another form. We are distinctly acquainted with the commencement of existence; but we know death only by conjecture. We now enjoy the light and blessings brought into the world about two thousand years ago, by a Heavenly Teacher. Can we suppose,

suppose, that he himself was not impressed with the noble and virtuous sentiments he so earnestly recommended? I cannot tell why this contrast makes an impression on me; but it is among the number of those ideas which readily occur to my mind when I reflect on this subject.

Another comfortable thought still strikes me: The natural order of the universe appears to me a finished system. We perceive a perfect regularity in the revolution of the heavenly bodies,—an invariable succession in vegetable life,—an almost incredible precision in that immense quantity of volatile particles subjected to the laws of affinity; and we believe, with certainty, that every thing is in its right place,—that all the parts exactly fulfil their destination, in the grand system of nature.

If we turn our attention to the multitude of beings inferior to man, we shall also discover, that their action is complete, and perfectly conformable to the faculties they are endowed with; since they are impelled by irresistible instinct, to perform every thing necessary for their situation, and nothing more. Impressed with these ideas, and filled with admiration, at the general harmony, Have we not ground to presume, that man who is, as it were, transported into infinite space by his intelligence,—who is ever struggling with the obstacles opposed to the perfection at which he aims,—in short, that man, the
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most noble work of nature, only commences his existence in this sublunary state? Since all that composes the material order of the universe, appears to us in such admirable harmony, Ought we not to conclude, that the moral order in which we perceive many things vague and indeterminate, and which is connected with a system more sublime and astonishing than the other parts of creation, will one day be ultimately disclosed? This singular contrast between the harmony of the physical, and the apparent confusion of the moral world, seems to announce a time of equilibrium and completion : A time when we shall all discover the agreement of the moral arrangement with the wisdom of the Creator, as we already perceive the wisdom of His designs, in the perfect correspondence of the innumerable blessings of nature, with all the various wants of man, and every other creature.

The grandeur of the human mind, is indeed, a vast subject of reflection. This marvellous constitution points out to us continually a design proportioned to so noble a conception. The soul needed not to be endowed with such exalted faculties, to fulfil the limited plans and trivial pursuits of this short life. Thus every thing authorises us to carry our views farther. Were I to see such men as Columbus, Vesputius, or Vasco de Gama in a ship, I would not suppose that they only intended to sail continually about the coast.

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Some philosophers, in order to destroy our hopes, assert, that the soul is material, and that we should believe it to resemble those things which we see perishing around us. But only the forms change; the vivifying force does not perish: Perhaps, the soul resembles that force, with this difference, that, as it is composed of memory, reflection and foresight, it exists only by a series of consequences, which form the distinct attributes and particular character of its essence. It follows then, that it cannot be generalised, like the blind force which animates vegetation in a universal manner; but that every soul is, in some measure, a world to itself, and that it ought to preserve separately an identity of interest, and consciousness of preceding thoughts. Thus, in this system, the body which distinguishes us in the eyes of others, is only the transitory habitation of that soul which is not to die,—of that soul, susceptible of continual improvement, which, by a progress we can have no conception of, will probably approach insensibly to that magnificent period, when it will become more worthy of an intimate knowledge of the Author of Nature.

But, say the materialists, how can we conceive the action of the soul on our senses without a point of contact? How can we conceive that contact without the idea of matter? Experience alone teaches us, that contact is necessary to produce motion; and without that previous knowledge,

ledge, the rapidity with which one body sometimes strikes against another, could only have represented to us the time necessary for their approach. However, since we have no metaphysical knowledge of the cause of motion, and since, experience alone guides our judgment with respect to this, Why should we resist the idea, that we possess an internal faculty which acts of itself? The intimate feeling which we have of it, is surely an evidence worthy of credit. Besides, we can never allege, that such a property is opposite to the nature of things, since, if we adopt the system of the creation of the world, this property may proceed, like all others, from the Divine Power; and if, on the contrary, we admit the irreligious opinion of the eternity of the universe, there must have been from eternity a general movement without impulsion, without exterior contact, or any outward cause whatever; and the action of our soul might be subject to the same laws.

The notion of a contact being necessary to effect a movement would never have occurred, had we not bounded our observation to the influence of our ideas on our determinations, and the influence of those determinations on our physical being. In short, the laws of attraction and repulsion are subject to great exceptions: Exceptions which may serve to support the system of the spirituality of the soul. May we not be allowed to say,

say, that there exists a sort of vacuum in the universe; since, without this void in which bodies change their places, there could have been no motion? It is known, that this motion depends on the laws of attraction; but how can attraction act through a vacuum, unless we admit a spiritual force, which operates without contact, and without interruption from the interposition of matter or its atoms? I may then adopt this force, or its equivalent, as the cause of the impressions of which our souls are susceptible.

Let others explain, in their turn, by what material communication, the sight of a few immoveable characters, traced on insensible marble, disturbs my soul. I may be made to comprehend, by what mechanism the eye distinguishes the characters; but there ends the physical action: For we cannot attribute to that action the general power of producing moral sensations in the mind; since perhaps, any other man might view the same characters, without receiving a similar impression.

It is very possible, that our intellectual perceptions have no connection with motion, such as we conceive it. Our *interior* nature, which we distinguish by the name of *spiritual*, is probably very different from our *external* nature. But since we are obliged to apply to the mysteries of the soul, those expressions which serve to delineate
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and explain the phenomena submitted to our inspection, the continual use of such expressions has insensibly habituated us to entertain similar notions with regard to the causes and development of our intellectual faculties. Thus, after having used the words *motion*, *rest*, *agitation* and *action*, to distinguish different affections of the soul, we come, at last, really to assimilate our moral nature, to the ideas which are represented by these denominations. Even death itself, of which we have no knowledge, but by the dissolution of our physical being,—death, that image borrowed from things that are under the inspection of our senses, has, probably, neither relation nor analogy with the nature and essence of our spirit. These are incomprehensible secrets, and a kind of knowledge very different from any thing with which we are acquainted.

We act, with regard to these mysteries, like men born deaf, who apply to sounds those terms which they are accustomed to use, in speaking of colour, smell, solidity, and other properties that they comprehend by means of the senses with which they are endowed.

I shall add only another observation: Perhaps we should never have thought of applying the words which express *action* and *motion* to all the operations of our soul, had we not, first, divided our spiritual being into a great number of depen-

dependencies, such as attention, reflection, thought, judgment, imagination, memory and foresight ; and then, in order to render intelligible those abstract parts of our mind,—those parts of a unity which we ourselves have decomposed, found ourselves under a necessity of resorting to those simple expressions which are generally understood. We have therefore adopted the words *action, progress, combat, movement* : But the familiar use of these terms, in explaining the accidents of our moral system, very much resembles the use we make of x in algebra, in every calculation which involves a supposition.

In short, though we should suppose that the action of our soul were subjected to some particular laws of motion, forming one of the dependencies of the great one, yet the cause of the consciousness we have of this action, would still remain to be explained ; a wondrous consciousness, which Atheists refuse to Nature, although, at the same time, they consider Nature as the God of the universe. Were reason even able to convince us, that all the operations of the human mind are subjected to the impressions of external objects, yet we could not rank under the same laws, the consciousness we have of our existence, and the different faculties of our soul. This consciousness is neither the result nor the production of any known force ; since it has always existed within us, independent of external
objects,

objects, and never can be investigated by us. In our intellectual organization, it resembles the distant idea of eternity, that infinite and profound thought, which even imagination can never comprehend !

Let us, however, admit for a moment, that all the operations of our soul are determined by some certain impulsion, still we shall be struck with the absolute difference which exists, according to our apprehension, between the regular movement of matter, and the various unaccountable emotions of our hearts and minds : Emotions so numerous, and so differently modified, that our attention is distracted in attempting to examine the multiplicity and immense diversity of the ideas which give rise to them. After having vainly endeavoured to conceive the union established between our thoughts and exterior objects, we have yet to form an idea of the action of these thoughts on themselves,—their progress and connection. Our mind, wandering and confounded amidst such reflections, leaves us only a consciousness of our weakness ; and we feel that there is a certain altitude, and, as it were, an intellectual summit, above which the human faculties can never rise.

One single character, within the reach of our judgment, enables us to discover an absolute difference between *soul* and *matter*. It is easy to conceive, that the latter must be infinitely divisible,

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fible, whilst, on the contrary, all the efforts of imagination could never divide the wonderful unity we call *self*, which is sovereign over our will, our thoughts, and all our faculties*.

If we examine the properties of matter in other respects, we can as little assimilate the emotions of the soul to them; for we feel distinctly that those emotions, however numerous, and though acting at the same time, always terminate in one centre, which is that indivisible Being we call *self*: whereas matter, by an essential property, can never be pressed or struck in different ways, at the same instant, except in separate points, which tend to different centres.

There is then no resemblance between the impressions that our souls receive, and the various effects we attribute to the action of those material substances with which we are conversant.

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* Some persons, in order to weaken this argument, have alleged, that the same indivisible unity may be attributed to all the qualities of matter: That a round body may indeed be divisible, but that *roundness* or *impenetrability*, are not so. Such an objection is evidently ill founded. Roundness and impenetrability are only qualities; and every quality, considered in the abstract, must necessarily be invariable; thus, we can no more *divide* it, than we can *multiply* or *increase* it. But my soul, my thoughts, my consciousness, form a personal, a particular existence, and if they were of the nature of matter, they ought, like it, to be divisible.

fant. Those substances are always connected with the idea of space and extent. But that ultimate point in which all our perceptions terminate,—that absolute judge, who dictates laws in the internal empire, the revolutions of which we only know,—that sole director of our will,—that *self* in short, which is at once our friend and master, can never be found in any compound idea. This simple *unity* of *self* may then fully convince us, that there is nothing within the reach of our senses, that can serve as a type of the idea which we ought to form of the soul.

When we consider the various deliberations and decisions with which that spiritual unity, that *self*, is constantly occupied, we discover further traces of this truth. We imagine it seated on a throne, hearing and examining the various reasons which are to determine its action: We see it, like Nero, yielding sometimes to Narcissus and sometimes to Burrhus: But although we plainly discover all the counsellors, flatterers and enemies which surround it, yet we remark only a single master amidst the tumults and intrigues of this court.

In short, since the soul may be agitated by mere abstract and fugitive ideas, the operation of which is, of all things, the most opposite to the action of matter, What reasoning can persuade us that it is not purely intellectual and
spiritual?

spiritual? It is true, that corporeal infirmities often affect the mind; but this relation is no proof of identity, since the body may probably be an organ designed for the temporary use of the soul. Continuity of existence, considered abstractly, is certainly, in the universe, the most simple and natural state, and a transitory existence is perhaps the only one which is truly extraordinary and complicated. The soul is too noble to be assimilated to the latter kind: It may seem to exist in a different manner, when joined to a material substance, but that connection does not destroy its original essence.

It is by our senses, no doubt, that we discover all the powers which belong to our existence. They are the parts of our mixed being, which strike us most forcibly during the present moment. It is perhaps by a natural law of this kind, that we find men, when transported by any violent passion, entirely insensible to every other moral affection. But why should it be contrary to the nature of things, that the soul, once stripped of its terrestrial cloathing, should become acquainted with its own nature, and, rising to a superior rank in the universe, should perceive those truths which are at present involved in obscurity? A latent fire languishes unknown in the cold flint; but, on being struck, there issues from it a brilliant light. This may,

perhaps, afford a faint resemblance of the state of the soul when death breaks its fetters.

Since, in a matter so obscure, every supposition is admissible, Who can assure us, that our soul has not been, while on earth, as it were, under a magical influence, or in a kind of interruption of its ordinary existence? All we see of the universe is an assemblage of incomprehensible phenomena; and when we strive to resolve our doubts by the aid of ideas on a level with our intelligence, we wander from the truth, which often seems to lie concealed in the depths of infinity.

It may be doubted whether we can allow the metaphysical reasonings employed in defence of the spirituality of the soul, to have decisive authority: Such arguments are, however, sufficient to repulse the attacks of materialists. To me it appears evidently true, that we are all too weak to attain or comprehend the secret for which we search. We have, according to our small degree of knowledge, divided the universe into two parts, *spirit* and *matter*: But this division only serves to distinguish those things of which we know *a little*, from others of which we know *nothing*. There are, perhaps, infinite gradations among the various properties which compose motion and life, instinct and intelligence. We can indeed only express such ideas as are within the reach of our understanding;

ing ; and the general terms which we use, often serve merely to detect the vain ambition of our mind : But when we consider the immensity of the universe, we shall find, that there is sufficient space for all those shades and modifications, which we cannot express, nor even conceive.

It cannot be denied, that the connection of our physical powers with our intellectual faculties, and the action which they have on each other, give rise to doubts and anxieties ; but, independent of this relation, and the appearance of our decay and fall, all would be distinct and manifest in the fate of man. Since then, a shade appears in the midst of the picture, which continually attracts our attention, we must collect all our intellectual light, to discover the distant prospect of our destiny ; and, for the same reason, we must, above all, have our minds deeply impressed with the idea of a God, in whose power and goodness we ought to look for that ultimate explication which we seek.

There is a sort of contradiction observable in some mens opinions, with which I have been often struck. The same persons, who, amidst the immense prodigies of the universe, will venture to ascribe the power of understanding all the secrets of nature to our intellectual faculties, nevertheless wish to divest the soul of its true dignity, by refusing it that spirituality and duration, by which alone it can be exalted.

Happily, neither these refusals nor concessions, can fix our fate. The nature of the soul will ever remain as much unknown to us as the essence of the Supreme Being : And it is even a proof of the grandeur of the soul, that it is involved in the same mysteries that conceal from us the Infinite Intelligence, which directs and preserves the universe. But there are some simple and intimate sentiments, which afford us more comfort and hope than metaphysical reasonings. When we contemplate the wonderful attributes of thought, and the vast empire subjected to it,—when we reflect on the faculty with which it is endowed, of fixing the past, of advancing to futurity, of bringing the whole universe into its view, and comprehending, as it were, in one point, the immensity of space and the infinity of time,—when we consider this prodigy, we must join to our deep admiration, a belief that there is some end, some purpose, in view, worthy of so great a conception, and worthy of the wisdom of Him whom we adore. Can we then discover this great end, in the transient breath, the fleeting moment, which composes life ? Can we discover it in those phantoms of a day, whose successive appearance would serve only to mark the progress of time ? In short, Can we find it in this general system of destruction, where the insensible plant, unconscious of life, and the intelligent man, who discovers

discovers all the charms of existence, must equally sink to nothing? Let us not thus degrade our nature and our destiny; and let us judge and hope better of what is unknown to us. Life, which affords us constant means of approaching towards perfection, should not lead to eternal death. The mind, which is the prolific source of knowledge and intelligence, ought not to be lost in the dreary abyss of annihilation. Sensibility, which, by its pure and gentle emotions, unites us to others, in a manner so delightful, ought not to evaporate like a dream. Conscience, which continually watches our actions, as a severe and incorruptible judge, could not be intended to deceive us. Piety and virtue cannot, surely, in vain, elevate our views to that model of perfection, which is the object of our love and adoration. The Supreme Being, to whom all times belong, seems already to have sealed our union with futurity, by endowing us with foresight, and by implanting in our heart a passionate desire of long duration, with a secret sentiment which, in the recesses of our soul, encourages our hope of future existence. There are certain relations, though obscure, between our moral nature and futurity; and perhaps our wishes, our hopes, are a sixth sense, a sense as it were at a distance, of which we shall one day experience the enjoyment. I sometimes

imagine too, that love,—the noblest ornament of our nature,—the sweetest charm of life, is a mysterious pledge of the accomplishment of these hopes : For, by disengaging us from ourselves, and, as it were, carrying us beyond the limits of our own being, it seems the first step towards an immortal nature ; and, by affording us an example of an existence out of ourselves, it seems to demonstrate to our feelings, that which our minds cannot comprehend.

What appears to me the most striking reflection of all, is, that when I see the human mind attaining to the knowledge of the existence of a God,—when I see it, at least, aspire to an idea so grand, that lofty degree of elevation prepares me, in some measure, for the sublime destiny of the soul. I look for a proportion between that great thought and all the concerns of this world, but I find none ;—between that boundless prospect, and the narrow picture of life, but I perceive none. There is then, without doubt, some magnificent secret, beyond all that we can discern,—some astonishing wonder behind this curtain, that is yet unfurled, of which we every where see the commencement. Ah ! Can we indeed imagine, that all that affects and animates us, all that guides and directs us, is merely a series of deceits, an assemblage of illusions ! The universe, with all its majestic pomp, would then have been destined to serve as a theatre for an empty

empty shew ; and that great idea, that magnificent conception, would have had for its object, a mere dazzling chimera ! What had then signified this mixture of real beauties with false appearances ? What had availed this concourse of phantoms, without end or design, whose existence would be less estimable than a ray of light destined to enlighten their dwelling ? In short, What had signified in those beings, that union of sublime thoughts and deceitful hopes ? Let us beware of giving credit to such a supposition. Would we thus dare to impute to Him whose power has no limits, the artifices of weakness ? Ah ! if so far as our understanding can reach, we every where perceive an order, a design, a dependence, shall we, as soon as we arrive at the limits of our faculties, there set bounds to the views of Supreme Intelligence, and fancy that all is terminated, because we are ignorant of what may succeed ? Alas ! we possess but a day, but a moment, and yet we pretend to tell all that has been, and all that will be ! Let us, however, only retain the idea of a God, let us not quit our confidence in the existence of the Supreme Ruler of the World, and by habituating ourselves to this elevated thought, we may defend our hopes against all the metaphysical arguments which otherwise we might not be prepared to answer.

Will

Will it be here said, That mere hope is insufficient for determining men to observe morality, and for subjecting them to those acts of selfdenial, which the practice of virtue seems to demand? But what else than hope actuates them, in all the occurrences of life? What else than hope renders them ambitious of honour and fortune? and when they have arrived at the wished for object, what do they, for most part, obtain, except an advantage depending on imagination and hope? Wherefore, then, should they require certain demonstration, to induce them to seek after those things which are by far the grandest, and most worthy of pursuit, of any that the human mind can conceive? On the contrary, the smallest degree of probability should here become a motive of encouragement: And what worldly concerns can be put in competition with the slightest hope of pleasing the Ruler of the universe, and of maintaining that intercourse with Him, which seems to be indicated by our natural sentiments, and by the first perceptions of our mind?

I may go still further; I may venture to ask those at least who possess sensibility, if, even on the supposition, that this life were their sole heritage, they would not still feel a desire of pleasing the Sovereign Author of Nature? Ought not these moments He has granted us, in which we may know and admire Him, to be considered

as a benefit? We celebrate the memory of those princes who have signalised themselves in the world by doing good, and shall we not render homage to Him who, if it be allowed so to speak, has planned our existence, and the various enjoyments to which we are so strongly attached,—to Him who has formed our magnificent habitation, and made the elements subservient to its use,—to Him who has permitted us to see the wonders of the universe, and who has made us so frequently, though not constantly, to enjoy happiness? Shall we who are so weak and ignorant, dare to measure the wisdom, and calculate the power of our Supreme Benefactor, and impiously reproach Him for not having done more for us? This would indeed be the language of the basest ingratitude. But I have already proved, that our sentiments are not put to this severe test: We are allowed more liberal conditions in treating with the Supreme Being. He has every where surrounded us with objects to encourage our hopes. He has permitted us, to arrive at some knowledge of His perfections, and to read them in that assemblage of glory and magnificence which the universe displays. He has allowed us to attain the perception of goodness, of power, of infinity and of happiness; and by this succession of ideas He has guided our desires and our hopes. How great, how sublime, is the contemplation of the Eternal, how comfortable

fortable to a soul possessed of sensibility! But these ideas ought to be early implanted in the human heart,—they ought to be connected to our first thoughts, while our sentiments are purely natural, so that they may gradually advance, in order to gain vigour,—before we come to mix with the presumptuous multitude, who are disposed to treat every thing with contempt that is not their own work,—before we enter into society, amidst men, who fancy themselves to be enlightened, whilst, hurried on by levity, they every day follow a new master, and are really the slaves of pleasure and vanity.

The establishment of public worship is the most proper means of maintaining such principles, as have been thus early inculcated,—a simple method, well calculated to command attention to those abstract reasonings that are often necessary for communicating instruction. Public worship, by assembling men of every station, by recalling them to a just sense of their own weakness, and equally humbling every individual before the great Ruler of the universe, would be, merely from these circumstances, an important lesson of morality. But this worship is a constant source of consolation to some, while it habitually reminds others of their duty. Above all, it is grateful to those gentle and feeling minds, who maintain a constant awful sense of their dependence on God,—who love Him in secret,

secret, and wish to adore Him in his temples; where, joining in the general fervour of devotion, they venture to lift their faltering voices to Heaven, in humble supplication. In short, while men are astonished and lost in amazement, on considering the infinite grandeur of the universe, and the powers of their own souls, they are naturally led to the sentiment of adoration, which unites them, by a reverential awe, at least, to Him whom they can never comprehend, by all the powers of reason.

Let us beware of despising the emotions of piety; for they are inseparable from its advantages;—philosophers are bewildered in vainly attempting to confine the interests of man to the narrow circle of demonstrable truths: For those things which we see indistinctly and at a distance, are, for most part, more valued by us than others which are within our reach. Thus, we would be miserable sufferers indeed, were we to be deprived of the various enjoyments which depend solely on our imagination; for we have no other means of laying hold of things not immediately present. Besides, since we assume imagination for a guide, in our career of ambition, and in our pursuit of fortune,—since philosophers themselves have allowed that it is the spring of all the passions, Why shall we reject it, when, being occupied by a greater and more sublime object, it becomes the support of our
weakness.

weakness, the safeguard of our principles, and the source of our highest comfort?

It is the duty of Legislators to keep these truths in view, while they regulate the spirit of the laws, and direct the course of opinions: What a noble, what a glorious task falls to their share, —To connect Happiness with Morality, and Morality with the existence of a God!



C H A P. XII.

That there is a God.

THAT THERE IS A GOD! How can we utter these words, without the most profound humiliation, and the most awful reverence? and how can we reflect without astonishment, that man, this feeble creature, this atom placed amidst the immensity of space, undertakes to add some weight to that sacred truth, of which all nature is the splendid witness? But, since our supreme happiness depends on that truth, and since without it we are nothing, Why should it not be ever present to our mind? Why should it not constantly employ our thoughts? No other contemplation can be so truly interesting, since it is the source and support of every good, just and happy sentiment. I confess it was with diffidence, I at first ventured to discuss the objections which have been opposed to our belief in the existence of a God. I dreaded that I might be overwhelmed by the subtilty of argument, or,
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at least, that I might expose to some danger an opinion so precious, and so essential to my happiness. I found that a few general ideas, supported by lively feelings, were sufficient for my tranquillity: Thus, had I not, from an earnest desire of promoting the welfare of mankind in general, been resolved to give the utmost opposition in my power to that spirit of indifference, and false philosophy, which seems to be daily gaining ground, I should never have exceeded the bounds of my first enquiries. I am, however, very far from repenting of the part I have taken. Without risking my opinions, and without any uneasiness, I glanced over those books in which the most pernicious doctrines are artfully disseminated. It then occurred to me, that a man merely endowed with ordinary good sense, while he considers the subtilities of metaphysical disquisitions, in some measure resembles those uncultivated Indians, sometimes brought amongst us, who, ridiculing our depraved refinement of manners, often remind us by very obvious and natural observations, of many simple principles, and ancient maxims, of which we have entirely lost sight.

The whole structure of religious sentiments would fall to the ground, if, by false and subtle reasoning, our confidence in the existence of a God, were ever overthrown. Morality being no longer associated with those opinions that are its
true

true safeguard, would become defenceless, having no other support than political principles, whose influence would, in course of time, be insensibly weakened. Languor and melancholy would be diffused through every mind: There would then exist no sentiment equally interesting to all mankind, and proper to unite them into one community. Those few also, whose intentions being pure, can only be guided and sustained by intimate persuasion, would retire in dismay, and leave to others the care of supporting moral order by fiction and falsehoods. They would pity that forlorn race, destined to appear and disappear, like those plants that flourish but for a day;—they would condemn, those animated phantoms, that after making a buzz with their vanity and trivial passions, sink, in an instant, into eternal oblivion. All the beauties of the universe, that so powerfully excite admiration and rapture in the human breast, would soon lose their lustre and their charm, were we only to view in such a brilliant scene, the play of atoms, and the dull operation of blind necessity; for it is impossible to admire any thing, unless we perceive that it might have existed under a different modification. In short, this soul, this mind, this vivifying principle in man, this thinking faculty, which astonishes and confounds even those who revile it, would appear a vain movement, had it no cause, and were it to be followed by no

consequence,—were there no universal intelligence, secretly breathing animation throughout all nature. But we have dwelt too long on this gloomy subject: Resume your glowing colours and your life, ye wondrous works of God, the Creator of the universe! Come to instruct men,—to confound the pride of some, while ye support the timid sensibility of others! Come, to take possession of our souls, and to direct our united affections towards Him whom we ought to love, and who is the eternal model of perfect wisdom and supreme goodness.

I will not here undertake to prove the existence of a God, by a recital of the wonders we discover in the great and magnificent works of nature: Many celebrated writers have attempted this mode of proof, but their imperfect sketches have always fallen far short of the grand original. We cannot think of infinity without astonishment, and a humble respect, which overpowers all our faculties. Thus, while we endeavour, successively, to represent the various wonders of nature, this constant change of objects tends rather to suspend our admiration than to increase it: For every change eases the mind, by affording it a station on which it may repose, and that relaxation its weakness requires; on the contrary, if we fix our attention on any particular phenomenon, and endeavour to investigate it singly, we soon arrive at the limits of our faculties.

culties. We discover the narrowness of our understanding, as well by examining the organization of the smallest insect, as by contemplating the faculties of our own soul; and the mystery of simple vegetation seems as far above the reach of our intelligence, as the secret power that gives motion to the universe.

Then, as the natural effusion of my heart, and as a hymn of grateful praise to the Supreme Being, but not as necessary instruction, I will briefly enumerate some of the principal characters of wisdom and grandeur, with which all men must be equally struck when they contemplate the wonders of the universe.

What a sight is the world! What a magnificent spectacle for those who can divest themselves for a moment of their habitual indifference! We know not where to begin,—we know not where to fix, while we attempt to call to view so many prodigies; but the most noble of all is the faculty which has been bestowed on us, of conceiving and admiring them. What an astonishing and sublime relation do we find, between the innumerable beauties of nature, and our physical intelligence, which enables us to discover them, and to enjoy them with delight! What a wonderful connection do we also observe, between the order and harmony of the universe, with our moral intelligence, which enables us to aspire at unbounded wisdom and

knowledge! Nature, though immense, and all that it contains, all that it displays with so much splendour, seems to be connected by some particular relation, either to our senses, or to our mental powers. These invifible and incomprehensible faculties all unite to form that wonder of wonders, which we call *happinefs*. Let not thofe fimple terms we muft employ, turn our attention from the ineffable ideas which they represent! The great phenomena of our exiftence are the more wonderful, that they can neither be defined, nor expreffed in different ways; and the common words we ufe, fuch as, *foul, fpirit, fenfation, life, happinefs*, and many others which we pronounce fo lightly, all equally confound our underftanding, when we endeavour to fix our attention on the effence of thofe properties of which they are the fymbols. For this reafon, among many others, the fucceffive admiration of the various particulars in the works of nature, is never found to be fully fatisfactory to minds poffeffed of fenfibility; becaufe fuch admiration is founded on ideas dependent on human knowledge: But the principal charm of our relation with the wonders around us, arifes from our experiencing the continual impreffion of infinite greatnefs, and from feeling the neceffity of flying to that happy refuge for weaknefs and ignorance,—the fublime idea of a God. We are constantly carried back towards
this

this idea, by the vain efforts which we make to penetrate the secrets of our own nature: And when I fix my attention on those astonishing mysteries, which in a manner terminate the powers of our mind, I consider, with emotion, that they may, perhaps, be the only barrier that separates us from the Infinite Mind, the Source of all Intelligence.

Men who possess the most extensive genius, soon perceive the limits of their faculties, when they attempt to dive too far into the depths of metaphysical subjects: But the most simple and untutored mind, can readily distinguish those traces of order and harmony which every where announce, with so much lustre, a purpose and design worthy of infinite wisdom. It appears, that all the knowledge necessary to inspire men with proper sentiments, has been constantly placed within their reach. The intelligent astronomer, from observing the course of our globe around the sun, perceives the cause of that regular succession of winter and summer, which secures the fecundity of the earth, and renews, each revolving season, its brilliant attire: But does not the simple husbandman, who only sees the faithful earth annually pour out its rich bounties, which correspond, with such admirable precision, to the various wants of every creature, perceive enough to excite his admiration and gratitude? Newton analysed light, and calcula-

ted the velocity with which it glances through the immensity of space: But is not the illiterate herdsman, who sees, when he wakes, his cottage enlightened by the same rays which animate all nature, a witness of a phenomenon that must equally excite his wonder and gratitude? The indefatigable anatomist gains a just idea of the inimitable mechanism and wonderful structure of our various organs: But has not the unskilful man, who reflects a moment on the various sensations and pleasures of which we are susceptible, also sufficient ground for admiration and thankfulness?

The degree of knowledge peculiar to men of enlightened minds, is a kind of superiority which disappears before the incommensurable grandeur, presented by the idea of the universe. Compared with infinity, the talents of all men are equal; and it is probably beyond the utmost stretch of human intelligence, that the greatest wonders of nature begin. The knowledge of all ages has been unable to explain the imperious authority of our will over our actions. Neither has it been discovered, how our thoughts can reach the most remote ages;—how our minds can comprehend such a multitude of present objects, of recollections, and anticipations; nor is it known, how all these precious qualities of our mind, should sometimes remain in a latent state, as unconscious of their existence, and at other times,

times should issue from their obscurity, and at its command, either regularly succeed each other, or be poured forth with profusion. Alas! while we contemplate these astonishing phenomena, How presumptuous do men appear, who, through vain pride, misapprehending their degree of strength, strive to penetrate into those secrets, to which an invisible hand opposes their approach! Let them be contented that their existence is united to so many wonders,—let them be satisfied with the bounty of nature, and let them, with reverence, adore that Sovereign Power which has bestowed so many blessings on them, and established a relation between them and all the active principles of heaven and earth.

The globe which we inhabit, annually passes through a space of two hundred millions of leagues; and, in this immense course, its distance from the sun, by immutable laws, is exactly proportioned to the degree of temperature necessary for our weak nature, and perfectly accommodated to the important purpose of vegetation, without which no living creature could subsist.

The glorious orb that vivifies the seeds deposited in the bosom of the earth, is, at the same time, the source of that light, which discloses to our view the grand prospect of the universe. The rays of the sun traverse more than thirty

millions of leagues in eight minutes : A motion so rapid would be sufficient to reduce the largest masses of matter to powder ; but such is the inconceivable tenuity of these rays, that they strike the most delicate of our organs, not only without injuring it, but in a manner so gentle and pleasant, that they give rise to that delightful sensation, which is the origin of our greatest enjoyments. Thus, one principal means of our happiness is transmitted to us through the immensity of space.

Man, amidst boundless space, is only an imperceptible point ; and yet by his senses and his intelligence, he seems to be in communication with the whole universe. How pleasant, how peaceable is that communication. It is almost like the intercourse of a prince with his subjects : To man every thing is animated, every thing contributes to fulfil his desires and supply his wants : Nature seems entirely occupied, in providing for him. The action of the elements, and every thing on earth, like the rays of light, seem to be proportioned to his faculties and strength : And while the celestial bodies move with a rapidity which terrifies our imagination,—while this globe on which we dwell, is hurried along with them in their course, we remain in a quiet asylum, and peaceably enjoy a multitude of blessings, which are allied, in a wonderful manner, to our various inclinations and sentiments.

Man

Man has likewise the advantage of being often permitted to become, in some measure, the contriver of his own happiness. By his ingenuity and study, he is enabled to embellish his habitation, and add various ornaments to the simple beauties of nature. He improves by his care every useful plant ; and discovers some salutary properties, even in those that appear most dangerous : He can soften metals, and make them subservient to his purposes : He can make the marble to obey his touch, and assume whatever form he desires : He gives laws to the elements, or, at least, circumscribes their empire ; he opposes ramparts to stop the progress of the sea ; he sometimes confines rivers to their wonted channel ; and sometimes leads them into different courses, that they may extend their beneficial influence. He erects a shelter against the fury of the winds ; and by an ingenious contrivance, he employs for his use, that impetuous force, from which he, at first, sought only a defence. Even fire itself, whose terrible action seems to be the presage of destruction, is subjugated by him, and rendered, if I may speak so, the companion of his industry and labour.

How great a source of reflection is this dominion of the mind, over the most formidable effects resulting from the movement of blind matter ! It would appear, that the Supreme Being, by subjecting, in part, to our intelligence the force
of

of the most powerful elements, has chosen this method of communicating to us some notion of the empire, His infinite wisdom has over the universe.

But it is by the influence our intellectual faculties have on themselves, that we principally discover their admirable nature: We must remark with astonishment, the degree of improvement to which they sometimes attain by their own operation. Intelligence, considered in a general view, is undoubtedly a great phenomenon; but it is still more wonderful, to find our thoughts connected with, and agreeable to those of all other men; and that an alliance subsists between our present trains of thought and those of all ages. By such an alliance, the sciences have been improved, and the mind of man has become acquainted with all its own powers. The sovereigns of the earth cannot break this association, nor subject to their tyrannic divisions the august inheritance of knowledge: This precious gift still preserves the stamp of a divine hand,—and no one can say, ‘it is solely mine.’

The best use that man can make of this admirable union of knowledge and faculties, is to demonstrate to his fellow-creatures, how immediately every thing in nature is related to the idea of a great First Cause;—how in every different tract of study, we still behold a wise design, and a beneficent will, eminently displayed in all the phenomena

mena of the universe. But now, unhappily these indications, these proofs, will not suffice. A daring philosophy has ventured to sport with those arguments, founded on the connection and wonderful harmony of the system of nature. It is not enough to oppose to such opinions, the mere authority of final causes. The abettors of that philosophy do not deny, that there is a perfect conformity between our desires and our wants,—between our senses and the bounties of nature: They do not deny, that from the lofty cedar to the humble hyssop, from man to the meanest insect, there is a beautiful symmetry, and a just proportion; equally observable in the general relation of objects one to another, and in the connection of the several parts of each considered separately. But this admirable harmony, where the wise, the pious man, remarks with delight, the seal of an eternal intelligence, the followers of that most deplorable doctrine, strive to represent, either as the fortuitous union, and the mere play of atoms, agitated by a blind movement,—or as the nature of things, which has existed from eternity. What pains have they taken to invent and to defend those systems, so destructive of our happiness, and our hopes! I value the intimate feelings of my mind more than all this philosophy: But it might encourage its presumption, were we timidly to shun its approach. Let us then examine, whether its exterior

exterior pride, and its haughty pretensions, are founded on reason, and if it does not gain the respect of weak minds merely by its insolence.

I WILL attempt to treat this question, which is the most important one that can employ the thoughts of man, in the following manner:—I will first endeavour to show, that the different conjectures concerning the origin of the world, all terminate in one opinion, The eternal and necessary existence of every thing in nature. I will afterwards compare the basis of that system, with the foundation of that happy and natural belief, which unites the idea of a Supreme Being with all we see and know,—with the universe itself, the greatest and most unlimited of our conceptions.



C H A P. XIII.

The same Subject continued.

WHEN we find that several authors, who have framed conjectural systems with regard to the formation of the world, reject the belief of a God, as an idea foreign to the nature of our perceptions, Have we not a right to expect that they should, in its place, substitute something more probable, and better accommodated to our understanding? But, far from fulfilling such an expectation, they give way to every vague fancy, every wild conceit. Indeed, whether they refer the origin of the universe to chance, and a fortuitous concourse of atoms, or assume other hypotheses deduced from the same principles, yet we must still necessarily suppose,—the eternal existence of an infinity of small particles of matter, confusedly jumbled through the immensity of space,—that these atoms, thus universally diffused, should attract and fit each other by certain properties peculiar to their nature,—that there should result from their adhesion, not merely

ly the faculties of sense, but even the intellectual powers, such as thought, memory, foresight, judgment and will ;—in short, we must suppose, that those incomprehensible molecules have been arranged in such wonderful order, by the effect of some random chance, that may have possibly occurred amongst the infinite number of accidental combinations. Indeed, after they have made so many suppositions, without the least foundation, and without the smallest resemblance to any thing we know, it plainly appears, that the belief of an Intelligent Spirit, the soul and director of the universe, better corresponds with our nature, and has more analogy with such objects as are within the reach of our knowledge, than any thing they can advance.

But let us return to the examination of those hypothetical principles we have just mentioned. We readily perceive that they have arisen from a contracted mode of thinking. The mind is accustomed to pass from simple to compound ideas, when employed in study or invention : And by an inverse method, the composers of such systems, have thought it only requisite, in order to trace the universe to its origin, that they should detach all its parts, and, in imagination, divide and subdivide them to infinity. But however great the tenuity of those atoms may be supposed, yet, being possessed of such intellectual and organic properties, as fancy must allow them,

them, their existence would be a wonder in no respect inferior to all the phenomena with which we are surrounded.

When we see a plant spring up, and afterwards assume various beautiful colours, we only take into view the period in which its vegetation is obvious to our senses : But the seed of this plant, or, if it must be so called, the organized molecule, the first principle of this seed, would have afforded us an equal cause of admiration, were we endowed with faculties sufficient to penetrate into the occult mysteries of nature. But, by thus reducing the whole mass of matter which composes the world into an impalpable powder, we represent to our fancy a mere fugitive vapour, which merits not our admiration ; and those who unhappily wish to shun the sublime sentiment of admiration, are enabled, by this system of infinitely divisible atoms, to remove the period at which they must be lost in astonishment, to whatever distance they think proper.

All these fantastic schemes only tend to impede us in our search for truth. I shall here offer a general observation on this subject : The study of the first elements of such sciences as are our own work, as geometry, language, civil legislation, and several others, appears, no doubt, to be the easiest part of our education. It is, however, very different, when we attempt to investigate the laws of the physical world : For the
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works of nature never appear to us more simple than when we view them under their ordinary forms and combinations. They are then, to the mind, what harmony is to the ear,—and the just accord of all their parts, forms an unity perfectly accommodated to the degree of intelligence we possess. Thus, *man*, for example, that wonderful combination of so many different faculties, does not astonish the mind, on a general view, but is considered as a simple and familiar idea; yet we are embarrassed and disconcerted when we attempt to analyze his nature, and to discover the elementary principles of his liberty, his will, his thought, and the other properties of his mind.

We are then involved in profound obscurity, and only proceed in a circle, when we would destroy the present world, by reducing it to atoms, in order again to bring it forth afresh, after having rallied all the parts we had dispersed.

Let us, however, admit for a moment, that organic and intelligent atoms do exist, and that they are so, either from their own nature, or by their adhesion to other molecules, it is still necessary, that, with these atoms scattered in the immensity of space, the universe should be composed,—that masterpiece of harmony,—that perfect assemblage of every beauty and variety,—that inexhaustible source of every sentiment of
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admiration : And by rejecting the idea of a God, Creator and Ruler of all, we must have recourse to the power of chance, that is to say, to the unknown effects of a perpetual motion; which, without regularity, will produce, in an unlimited time, every possible combination. But to accomplish an infinite variety of combinations, it is not sufficient merely to admit a continual movement; we must also suppose that this movement constantly shifts its direction in all parts of space subjected to its influence. The existence of such a change, and of so much diversity in the laws of motion, is a new supposition, that may be ranked among the other extravagances attached to such systems.

But even granting all these chimerical hypotheses,—the system of the formation of the world by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms, is still attended with insuperable difficulties.

It is not easy to conceive that particles of matter, agitated in every possible manner, and capable, as has been supposed, of adhering in innumerable ways, should not have become so entangled, and have formed such a texture, as to have rendered the harmonious composition of the universe absolutely impossible.

When we consider abstractly the unlimited number of chances that may be attributed to blind movement, we cannot conceive, nor even conjecture, how an infinite number of atoms endow-

ed with a property of uniting themselves, and subjected to an endless diversity of movements, could compose the heavenly bodies : For, long before the period when such a great chance-stroke would have become probable, these atoms must have formed an immense multitude of partial combinations, and, had any one of these been incompatible with the general harmony, a world never could have been produced.

The same arguments are applicable to the formation of animated beings. Accident should have produced men capable of living and transmitting life to others, long before having endowed them with so great a diversity of faculties. And if they had happened to be formed with no more than four senses, they would never have acquired a fifth, for the same reason, that we never can attain any new sense. Besides, that particular accident which produced living creatures, must have occurred long previous to the chance which has prepared for these beings all the productions necessary for their support and preservation.

It may, indeed, be supposed, that such atoms as happened to be united in a manner incompatible with the arrangement of the universe, may have been separated by the continual movement supposed to exist in the immensity of space : But how should not such a movement disunite what it had formerly joined, and why
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should it not destroy that harmony, which is said to be the result of an accident, similar to the fortuitous stroke which occasioned the formation of the world?

Will it be alleged, that, supposing the constituent parts of matter to be once united in due proportion, and in masses proper to form the celestial bodies, this arrangement may be maintained by the effect of a predominant and invariable force? But how can we reconcile the prevalence of such a force with the continual movement and constant change supposed to be necessary for the composition of the universe?

It might be demonstrated in another manner, That the formation of worlds by the blind chance which depends on perpetual movement, and the invariable steadiness of those vast bodies, in their present state, are propositions absolutely irreconcilable. Let us illustrate this matter: The accidental combination of atoms necessary for producing the rude masses of the celestial bodies, being far less complicated than the combination necessary to produce them as they are, inhabited by intelligent beings, the first chance-stroke must, according to all the rules of probability, have very long preceded the other. Thus, according to the system of the fortuitous formation of the universe from atoms, we must suppose, that these atoms, after being united so as to form the heavenly bodies, have been disjoined, scattered into

the immensity of space, and again reunited, as often as might be necessary, in order that, by an infinity of chance-strokes, they should come at last to produce a world, such as ours, replenished with intelligent beings susceptible of improvement. Now, since those intelligent beings add nothing to the stability of the world they inhabit,—since they contribute nothing to the wonderful coalition of its parts, Why should this blind movement, which had so often united and disunited the parts of the universe before its formation, be now no more felt? Why should it not reduce this terrestrial globe we inhabit to atoms, or at least, afford us some instance of its destructive powers?

This argument is not merely confined to a world adorned with intelligent creatures; it is equally applicable to one merely regular in all its parts. For we find, in nature, a great multiplicity of beauties, and many traces of harmony, which seem unnecessary for the support of our globe, and which could not, with the smallest probability, be supposed to have been annexed to its existence, were it admitted that the earth had been formed, dissolved and reproduced an infinite number of times, before its present formation. And I would ask, Why no vestige, no appearance of such changes are now discoverable in the operations of nature, and how it happens that this supposed movement has been, all at once, stopped?

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This difficulty, however, may be resolved by the help of another supposition: It may be said that the union and dispersion of those atoms proceed so slowly and so insensibly, as to elude our notice; and that even the observation of preceding ages, joined to our own experience, cannot certainly assure us, that all the parts of the universe may not be separated by the same causes which effected their assemblage and junction.

No doubt, by plunging into infinity, and there forming such a chain of suppositions as may suit our purpose, we may put ourselves beyond the reach of every argument: And were I to follow the same course, in order to oppose one absurdity with another, I would ask why, amidst the infinite combinations produced by the perpetual movement, man had not been created, destroyed and created afresh, times without number, with the same faculties and thoughts, and under the same circumstances as at present? And if it has been so, why, since we could only be separated from our preceding existence by a sort of sleep, the duration of which is imperceptible, we should not appear, in our own apprehension, beings possessed of a perpetual existence? Infinity admits of this extravagant hypothesis, as well as the other vague suppositions, in which time is held of no account. We perceive, however, in what danger we are of erring, whilst we

makes use of the incomprehensible idea of infinity, and rashly endeavour to accommodate it, to the combinations formed by our limited understanding.

Let us now examine another objection: It may be alleged, That the planet we inhabit, is the result of an original chance-stroke; and that such an accidental stroke is the less improbable, if we suppose, that there exists in the immensity of space, an infinite number of other aggregations of atoms, equally produced by the first throw of the die, which represent every possible form and every imaginable proportion. But then I would ask, By what law could all those irregular bodies, which, from their number and bulk, must be subjected to many different movements, be prevented from deranging the system of planets formed at the same time with them, by this original chance-stroke?

I must here remark, that the order which we have access to perceive, should be considered as a proof of the universal order: For, in immensity, where one part is nothing, compared with the whole, no part, without exception, could be preserved, unless it were in equilibrium with all the rest.

Thus, whether we suppose *an infinite succession of chances*, to which the whole mass of atoms have ever been subjected, or whether we are contented with the first general throw, divided into *an infinity*

infinity of sects, reason will always oppose invincible difficulties to the conclusions that are attempted to be deduced from such hypotheses.

In short, we should never leave out of view, that, in order to understand this fortuitous formation of the world, according to every notion or apprehension of which we are capable, we must always suppose the eternal pre-existence of organized and intelligent atoms,—of all the laws of affinity, and of various eternal movements, accompanied with a regular procedure, capable of preserving the combinations produced by such diversified movements. I again repeat, that when the abettors of these systems, are obliged to have recourse to such miraculous first principles and, to allow to Nature such astonishing properties, it is very unaccountable how they make that Nature itself, all at once, to act a part so blind and passive, in the formation of the universe : One supposition superadded, more sublime than all the others, would have enabled them to avoid a conclusion so ridiculous.

Although these absurd systems, concerning the formation of the world, are founded on various unlimited hypotheses, yet, in my opinion, they have so much resemblance to each other, that we can scarcely discern any difference : And, on considering the narrowness of the circle through which the imagination can run, when applied to such deep conceptions, we discover in our fa-

culties, a singular and unexpected degree of weakness. The authors of these systems, are, as it were, captives bound fast in their own opinions, and the marks of their chain are very visible. They talk continually of corpuscles or atoms, which they suppose to play and mix together, either all at once, or at different times, in boundless space. But when they wish to form ideas of liberty and will, as they cannot analyze these properties, they suppose them pre-existing in the elementary parts of which they fancy the universe to be composed; and they prudently take care to grant no action to *liberty* and *will*, in case they should resist the various movements, by which, according to their hypothesis, the universe was formed.

Neither can they render this blind and accidental production of worlds more credible, by supposing not only an innumerable multitude of organized molecules, but even an infinite diversity of molds to attract and form these atoms, by a force similar to chemical affinity. Such a system, though perhaps sufficient to explain a few secondary causes, is quite inapplicable to the first formation of beings; for, with this assemblage of molds and atoms, all the great difficulties would still subsist. How shall we conceive, that the different molds would have classed themselves so properly as to construct the simplest regular form, of which the parts are in due proportion,

portion, and accurately arranged? How is it possible, that the mold destined for the organized atoms, of which the crystalline is composed, would place itself in the centre of the mold adapted to form the pupil of the eye? or how would that one fall under the mold requisite for the conformation of the eye-lid,—and so on, each mold corresponding with the other precisely, through various gradations and innumerable divisions and subdivisions?

Again, were we to suppose an infinite succession of molds, of which the larger always attracted the smaller, in the same manner as the molds attracted the atoms corresponding to them; such a supposition, though the most extensive one we are able to make, is quite insufficient to account for the simplest phenomenon in nature. After all, the direction of a wise and active force is indispensable, to arrange, with precision and regularity, those supposed molds and their peculiar animated molecules. It is also necessary that those destined to compose exterior fibres, should not obstruct the passage of those molds designed to form the interior organs: In short, it is necessary, that every one of these molds, in its procedure and developement, should exactly observe all the delicate shades and slight lineaments, which blend or distinguish the different parts of the simplest natural production,

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We are indeed acquainted with a power which acts in every direction,—arranges every thing in order,—proceeds constantly towards a purpose,—forms designs,—executes them or stops them as seems requisite, and which is, every moment, engaged in some complicated work : This power is *intelligent will*. We must then be astonished that this faculty, of which we have an intimate consciousness and daily experience, should always be overlooked by philosophers, when they endeavour to investigate the admirable order of the universe.

After rejecting the idea of a Powerful and Intelligent Will, as the director of the world, they may perhaps assume as a principle, the eternal existence of a blind force, which, by an incomprehensible necessity, may have been guided towards accomplishing a perfect and harmonious combination of all the particles of matter, at first confusedly scattered through the immensity of space : But this new supposition, like the others I have noticed, would only form a hypothesis exactly similar to that of the eternal existence of the universe. In short, the eternal existence of all the elements, substances, powers and properties, necessary to produce the universe, would be a phenomenon no way different from the eternal existence of the universe itself.

We may add, that these phenomena can only be separated in the mind by an indivisible instant,

stant, which, amidst the boundless extent of eternity, can have no place in the imagination. For any period that can be mentioned, would still be too late by an infinity of ages. The effect resulting from an eternal cause, like that cause itself, can be referred to no particular period, at which we may fix its commencement.

We thus perceive, under another point of view, how absurd and ridiculous those chimerical operations are, supposed to have taken place before the existence of the world,—and which have been sometimes attributed to random strokes of chance, and sometimes to the invariable laws of blind necessity.

It is then evident, that there is only one hypothesis which can be opposed to the belief of a God the sovereign Disposer of all things; that is, The system of the eternal existence of the universe. Such a system of Atheism will always be supported by more specious defences than any other; because, being founded on a vast and boundless supposition, it passes entirely beyond the reach of reasoning, like all those hypothetical ideas, where men suppose nature to act in a way precisely agreeable to their own fancy. I come now to consider this dangerous system, and to endeavour, by every means in my power, to demonstrate its absurdity.



C H A P. XIV.

The same Subject continued.

SOME philosophers, who have maintained that the world subsists of itself, and that there is no God, allege in support of their opinion, That if the eternal existence of the universe surpasses our understanding, the eternal existence of a God, the Creator and Disposer of all things, presents an idea still more incomprehensible; and that such a supposition, is only superadding *one difficulty more*; since, according to our mode of judging, the most wonderful work is a far less admirable phenomenon, than the intelligence which formed the design, and accompanied the execution.

Let us, in the first place, consider this argument. It is absurd to talk of *one difficulty more*, superadded in infinity: Familiar ideas and expressions, such as *more difficult, more easy, more simple*, and the like, being the result of comparisons, are only admissible within the circle of our

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own knowledge: Beyond that, such ideas are no more applicable; for we can perceive no degrees in that immensity which exceeds our view, and surpasses the reach of our intellectual powers.

No doubt the mind finds as much difficulty in endeavouring to form a distinct conception of God the Sovereign Author of Nature, as in attempting to comprehend the eternal existence of the world without any cause. However, when we endeavour to stretch our thoughts towards the first traces of time, and, if I may use the phrase, to the beginning of beginnings, we feel evidently, that far from considering the eternal existence of an intelligent cause as increasing the difficulty, we can only find repose in that opinion. Instead of reluctantly adopting this opinion, or thinking it improbable, we find it in reality most natural, since, according to our ordinary mode of judging, order is united to the idea of a design,—a multiplicity of combinations to the idea of intelligence. Thus, rising from smaller things to greater, and reasoning by analogy, we will naturally arrive at the idea of the existence of a being, endowed with an infinite extent of those intellectual powers, of which, in some degree, we ourselves partake. The existence of such an eternal intelligence, is, doubtless, more easily conceived, than that of a universe, where all would seem intelligent, except the original moving power. The workman is surely superior to the
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work: But, according to our apprehension and judgment, an intelligent combination, formed without intelligence, would be, of all others, the most incredible, as well as the most incomprehensible phenomenon.

It is of importance to remark, that according to the strange system in question, the more evidently the world appeared to be the result of admirable wisdom, the less able we would be to deduce any inference favourable to the belief of a God; since the author of a perfect work, is not so easily traced as an inferior artist. Thus, according to such a system, all those who may enumerate the majestic wonders of nature, stupidly injure the cause of Religion, and weaken our belief of a Supreme Being. I think it is needless to refute an argument which leads to a conclusion so truly ridiculous.

An attentive view of the universe must render us very dissident of the judgments we form with regard to the simplicity of the physical laws: For all the general operations of Nature, depend on movements too great and too complicated for our comprehension. The vast circuit of two hundred millions of leagues, which our globe annually makes, appears not, surely, the simplest method of determining the successive change of the seasons, and of assuring the reproduction of plants necessary for the subsistence of animated beings: Neither would it occur to us, that the distance
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of thirty-four millions of leagues, between the sun and the earth, was requisite, in order to proportion the rays of light to the delicacy of our organs. However, since, even in the narrow circle submitted to our view, we discover nothing of that supposed simplicity, Why should we be guided by such a principle, when we lift our thoughts towards the first link of the vast chain of beings,—when we attempt to examine, if there exists, beyond the immensity of the universe, an intelligent cause? How insignificant, amidst these lofty contemplations, do these trivial words appear, pronounced from our petty tribunal, *that is one difficulty more?* The buzzing fly would be less contemptible than we, if capable of perceiving the order and magnificence of our palaces, it should assert that no artist had planned the work, because the existence of the architect appears *one difficulty more*.

We then see, that in proportion to different degrees of capacity and skill, the term *simple* and *easy* are employed very differently. We daily see that the expressions are not applied in the same manner by the vulgar man and the man of cultivated understanding; yet the distance by which the different degrees of human intelligence is separated, is probably very inconsiderable amidst the universal scale of beings. All these reflections lead us to conclude, that beyond the limits of the human mind, what seems to us *compound* may

may be *simple*,—what seems *wonderful*, may be *easy*, and what we reckon inconceivable, may be *evident*.

HAVING examined the chief arguments used by the partisans of the atheistical systems in question, let us now endeavour to open a path amidst the labyrinth which surrounds us, and let us look for a guide to conduct us in our researches.

We are immediate witnesses of the existence of the world, and we are conscious of our own: Thus the *universe*,—the *causes* which produced the universe, or the *first principle* of these causes, must have been eternal. By this evident and natural proposition, the eternity of some existence, though the most incomprehensible of all ideas, is shown to be an incontrovertible truth. Now, in order to fix our opinion, we are obliged to chuse one of two *eternal* existences, the one *intelligent* and free, the other *blind* and void of consciousness,—How can we hesitate a moment in adopting the first? An eternal existence is so astonishing, and so much beyond our comprehension, that we must ascribe to it every thing great and sublime; and we are acquainted with nothing which possesses these characteristics in so eminent a degree as *intelligence* and *thought*.

Is it not very strange, that in those systematic divisions, an eternal existence should be denied to thought, whilst it is granted to matter and its
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blind combinations? What a subversion of all proportion! Shall we believe the eternal existence of *matter*, because it is present to our view; and shall we doubt the eternal existence of *intelligence*,—though we know that the small portion of it which we possess, is the source of our judgment, and even the guide of our senses?

Is it not equally strange, that, agreeably to such a system, feeling and consciousness should be confined entirely to that inconsiderable part of the universe, which is made up of animated beings? Thus would the whole of nature be inferior to a *part*: And if no spirit, no soul, animated the universe, man should appear, in his own eyes, to be the ultimate model of perfection; yet we only see in him, a slight sketch, a faint shadow, of something more complete and admirable. We perceive that he is always, so to speak, beginning to think; and all the efforts he can make, to extend the empire of his thinking faculty, only demonstrate that he pursues an end which continually recedes from his grasp. In short, after his greatest exertions, he feels more and more his own weakness: He studies, but he cannot know himself: He makes a few discoveries, but is soon lost in his researches; and he every where observes secrets in nature, which he cannot penetrate: He is fallen into the world like a grain of sand driven by the winds: He has neither consciousness of his origin, nor fore-

fight of his end : He discovers all the timidity and diffidence of a dependent being : He is led by instinct to raise his thoughts and wishes to heaven ; and if not intoxicated by fallacious reasoning, he will reverence, confide in, and adore a God, and reject with terror, the arrogant rank which some philosophers have audaciously assigned to him in the order of nature.

I must add, that the degree of admiration due to our intellectual faculties, would be greatly diminished, were we reduced to consider man as a mere vegetable body, the production of blind matter : For the most astonishing production can only occasion a slight emotion, if it cannot be referred to some intelligent cause. The discovery of wisdom and design, is as necessary to excite *admiration*, as the perception of will and affection is to produce *love*.

But, as soon as we view the human mind as the stamp of Omnipotence,—as soon as it appears the result of a Supreme Intelligence, it seems to resume its dignity, and all the faculties of the soul humbly bend to that wondrous conception.

The intellectual faculties of the human mind can then only be entitled to our admiration and respect, when we consider them as united with the idea of a God : By reflecting, in this manner, on their sublime properties and admirable essence, we become confirmed in the opinion, That there exists a Sovereign Intelligence, the
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Soul of the universe, which animates and governs all nature by immutable laws. Yes, we find in the human mind an original trace, an imperfect image, of those perfections, which are the attributes of the Great Author of Nature. What a wonder indeed is our thinking faculty ! But though possessed of so many astonishing powers, yet, being ignorant of its own nature, it must look beyond itself, in order to discover what it ought most to admire. This faculty is equally astonishing, whether we consider its vast extent on the one hand, or its narrow limits, on the other. A boundless space is open to its researches ; while, at the same time, it cannot comprehend any of those secrets which appear, by their proximity, to be most within its reach : Thus, the cause of its action, and the principles of its intellectual powers, remain entirely unknown to itself. Man, being then constantly reminded both of his grandeur and dependence, these thoughts will naturally lead him to the idea of Omnipotence. Amidst this mixture of knowledge and ignorance,—amidst the glimmering light we enjoy, every thing announces an evident design ; and methinks I sometimes hear this mandate given to the human soul, by the God of the universe : ‘ Go and admire a part of
‘ My universe,—learn to love Me, and to enjoy
‘ happiness ; but seek not to withdraw the veil
‘ with which I have covered the secret of thy

‘ origin, and thy existence. I have infused into
 ‘ thy nature some of those attributes which con-
 ‘ stitute My own essence,—thou wouldst be too
 ‘ near Me, wert thou permitted to penetrate those
 ‘ mysteries : Wait, therefore, the time appointed
 ‘ by My wisdom ;—till then thou canst only ap-
 ‘ proach Me by reverence and gratitude.’

We are connected to the universal Intelligence, not merely by the wondrous faculty of *thought*, but also by all those incomprehensible properties, known by the names of *liberty*, *judgment*, *will*, *memory* and *forefight* ; and, in short, by all the august assemblage of our intellectual faculties. When we contemplate this grand phenomenon, Can we any longer hesitate to believe in the existence of a God, the Eternal Ruler of the world ? No, doubtless : We possess within us, a faint image of that Infinite Power which we seek to discover. Man himself is, as it were, a universe, governed by a sovereign ; and, by his nature, it is easier for him to conceive the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, than to form any notion of those primary and occult properties of matter, by which some philosophers pretend to account for the production of the wonderful and harmonious system of the universe.

In many philosophical dissertations and theories, our thinking faculty is, in my opinion, treated with too little respect. Some have been so much afraid of honouring it, that they will not admit it

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for a *simple* and distinct principle, when treating on the immortality of the soul; nor will they consider it as a *universal* principle, when the subject is the belief in the existence of a God.

It is indeed very strange, that these philosophers wish to compose a soul endowed with the most sublime qualities, from inert matter, which has no relation to thought; and at the same time pretend, that the world, in which we see beings capable of thinking, has not been formed and sustained by some superior thought, or Intelligent Principle. To suppose that it had, would be as reasonable as the other is improbable: But it would appear, that they chuse rather to consider the order of nature as the result of confusion, than of previous order and design.

When we endeavour to penetrate the secret of the formation of the universe,—when we reflect on the origin and cause of that vast and magnificent structure, Shall we not think of attributing to its first principle, what appears most marvellous within our sphere of knowledge, and most analogous to such a composition,—thought, design, and will? Why would we deny these sublime properties to the Grand Cause which produced the world? Are we to be sparing in an hypothesis which includes all the wonders of nature? Man is become master of the earth by means of his intellectual faculties: By them, he has subjugated ferocious animals,—conquered the

elements, and found a shelter from their impetuosity : By these faculties, man formed the social laws,—put a necessary check on his passions, and improved all his means of happiness : In short, nothing has ever been done or invented without the aid of his mind ; yet in his speculations on the formation of the universe, Will he not admit, or will he dare to reject, the action of intelligence and thought ? This would be like men disputing about the means employed in building a pyramid, who should name all sorts of instruments, except those which they saw lying at the foot of the edifice.

Habit alone turns our attention from the assemblage of wonders which compose our soul ; and thus, unhappily, admiration, that vivid light of the mind and feelings, does not afford us more instruction. Ah ! what different emotions would the inconsiderate feel, were they to contemplate, for the first time, the smallest part of this admirable whole ! How soon, by this means, would the belief of the existence of a God appear rational and probable to those who are, at present, becoming daily more estranged from that sublime thought ! In order to illustrate this truth, let us examine a detached part of our moral constitution. Let us then fancy, for a moment, that men should become as immoveable as plants, but retaining certain senses, the power of reflection, and the faculty of judging and of communicating

nicating their thoughts. Were we to hear these animated trees discourse amongst themselves on the origin of the world, and on the first cause of all the wonderful phenomena in Nature, they might, no doubt, advance various hypotheses, as we do, on the fortuitous movement of atoms,—the infinity of chances,—and the laws of fatality or blind necessity. Amongst other arguments employed to controvert the existence of a God, that which would have most weight with them must be, ‘That it is impossible to conceive how
 ‘ an idea should be changed into a reality, and
 ‘ how a simple design to arrange the parts, and
 ‘ put them in motion, should have any influence
 ‘ on the execution: For the will,’ say they,
 ‘ being a mere wish,—a thought without the
 ‘ least power, has no possible means of metamor-
 ‘ phosing itself into action: Thus,’ continue those reasoning plants, ‘it would be in vain for
 ‘ us, who are immoveable spectators of the works
 ‘ of nature, to wish for a change of situation, or
 ‘ to desire to approach each other, —to raise de-
 ‘ fences against the impetuosity of the winds, and
 ‘ the scorching rays of the sun; for such wishes
 ‘ would be altogether fruitless:’ They would therefore conclude, ‘That it would be evi-
 ‘ dently absurd to imagine, that any faculty
 ‘ could exist, which appears so absolutely contra-
 ‘ ry to the immutable nature of things.’

Suppose, however, that in the midst of this conversation, they should be interrupted by a supernatural voice, or by an angel, who should thus address them: ‘What would you think, were this wonder, which you regard as an impossibility, to be executed before your eyes;—and were the faculty of acting according to your own will, all at once given to you?’ Struck with astonishment, they would exclaim, ‘We prostrate ourselves before thee with reverence and gratitude; and from this instant, without further doubt or hesitation, we are convinced that we have attained the secret of the origin of the world; we will therefore ever adore the infinite power of that *Intelligence* which has directed the laws of nature.’

But this phenomenon, which would appear incredible, and even impossible, to those who had never been witnesses of it,—this wonder exists,—we see it and experience it every moment; and yet the influence of habit, so destructive of admiration, makes us pass it over without notice.

The supposition which I have just now made, is equally applicable to the sudden acquisition of all the faculties by which we are enabled to communicate our ideas; and indeed to the immediate discovery of any one of the intellectual powers. But some of those powers are, as it were, so blended, with the intimate essence of the

the soul, that they can no more be distinguished from it, than *action* can be separated from *will*, or *will* from *thought*.—Others of those wonderful powers are of such a nature, that they cannot be defined; nor could we have any knowledge of their existence, without actually possessing them. Indeed, had it been possible by any means, to have discovered *thought* and *intelligence*, without possessing these powers themselves, the inventors of the various atheistical systems, would certainly have laid hold of this means, as most applicable to the composition of the universe.

We shall be led to the same reflections, when, without enquiring into the greatest wonders of our nature, we limit our inquiries to that period at which the action of the human mind becomes evident. To illustrate this observation, let us follow a man of genius in the course of his labours: Let us observe how he comprehends, at one glance, an immense number of ideas, compares them, notwithstanding their distance, and deduces from them a distinct result, proper to direct his public or private conduct: Let us see how he extends and multiplies these first combinations, and connects them in a wonderful manner to certain points, which his imagination has fixed in the vast regions of futurity; and how, by means of these magical succours, he approaches, in thought, to a time which does not yet exist: Let us view him, in his career, availing himself of
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an immense diversity of knowledge, more subtle than the rays of the sun, and yet distinguished with admirable precision,—more light and fleeting than the vapours of the morning, yet still subject to that astonishing power which, under the name of *memory*, lays up in store the acquisitions of the mind, in order to be assisted by them in future pursuits: Let us further ask this man of genius, while he commits to writing his various reflections, How he knows, at once, that such or such a thought is new, or that the style of a particular passage has an original turn? Let us consider how, in order to form this judgment, he can with such rapidity recapitulate the thoughts and figures of speech employed by others in former times,—where he can place those registers which he must consult,—and how he can, in an instant, be certainly persuaded that he has, in a manner, surpassed all that has been thought or written in preceding ages. In short, let every one contemplate those mysterious beauties of the human understanding, and, according to his ability, endeavour to account for them; let him then enquire what impression he receives from such reflections. There is not, perhaps, so great a distance between the most perfect vegetable and the human mind, as between the human mind and the idea we form of the infinite intelligence of the Supreme Being. To be convinced of this, it may be sufficient to suppose,

pose, that there exists in the immensity which surrounds us, a gradation similar to what we observe in the small space we are permitted to view.

The author of a celebrated work blames mankind, because they have always had a reference to their own faculties, in the comparisons they make, while they endeavour to investigate the first principle of the existence of the world. But at what other point can we commence, when we are to reason and judge? Is it not enough, that the idea of a Supreme Being is metaphysical? Shall we endeavour to abstract ourselves, and attempt to find an imaginary support to our opinions and judgments, which may be exterior to us, and absolutely foreign to our nature? This is altogether incomprehensible. We pretend not to have sufficient powers to know the essence and perfections of God; but by pursuing such abstractions, we only deprive ourselves of the few means we possess. It is indeed very necessary, that we should judge of things we do not know, by the assistance of those we are acquainted with. We are always led astray, when we seek to take any other course: Yet some philosophers have striven to combat our internal feelings by abstract and arbitrary ideas, of which a capricious imagination is the only foundation.

Thus it must be always surprising, that amidst our contemplations and habits of thinking, while
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we perceive the wisdom of design, the general harmony, and all the traces of intelligence in nature, we should, all at once, renounce this mode of judging and thinking; that we may attribute the formation of the world to the effect of chance, or to the laws of blind necessity; and it is impossible that we can deduce from this the same consequences with regard to the admirable order of the universe:—All must appear in confusion without plan or design. Facts so different, principles so contrary, cannot lead to the same conclusion. The magnificence which appears in the universe, ought to be taken into consideration, when we form conjectures on its origin; and we cannot be easily persuaded that, in the investigation of such important truths, we should hold of no account all the ideas we acquire by viewing the wonders of nature. It would be indeed going a great length, were men to reject all arguments drawn from final causes; it would not be merely one prolific thought alone they would thus destroy,—they would entirely cut off the source of all our knowledge.

The various wonders of nature being all displayed to us, as it were, at one view, we insensibly cease to perceive their connection with the existence of a God: But if the Great Ruler of the universe had thought fit to exhibit successively the numerous acts of his power, our imagination, being animated by the frequent change
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of objects, must, of necessity, have risen to the idea of a Supreme Being. It is then because a multitude of miracles are accumulated to aggrandize the universe,—because an inimitable harmony seems to unite the immense diversity of parts into an admirable whole,—because profound wisdom maintains a general equilibrium, and, in short, because insensible gradations and delicate shades, render the wondrous works of nature more perfect, that men are not immediately struck with astonishment, and lost in admiration.

Perhaps you may say, that new phenomena would be requisite to determine your belief.—But have you then forgot, that all you at present behold, surpasses your understanding? Alas! were the smallest miracle performed before your eyes, you would instantly be ready to bend your haughty reason; and yet, because the greatest and most wonderful that can possibly be conceived, has preceded your existence, you affect to remain unconcerned, and pretend that all appears simple and necessary! But what influence has your momentary contemplations on the reality of the wonders in the universe? Your passage through life, is an imperceptible point amidst the view of eternity: Admiration, surprise, and all the affections of the soul, do not alter the nature of the phenomena which are their objects; and the mind, like a mirror, can only

only reflect a very small portion of the immense prospect of the universe.

Neither do we need any new revolution in the order of nature, to convince us of the power of its Author: The texture of a blade of grass far surpasses our intelligence: And when we have grown old in study and observation, we may still discover new objects, and new relations, which we have not investigated. We are, indeed, every where surrounded with things unknown and incomprehensible.

Let us, however, for a moment, suppose that there existed such miracles as might immediately convince us; yet it is plain, that they would not have so much influence on the opinions of men, as some people have imagined: For if they were frequently repeated, and occurred periodically at equal intervals, their first impression would be gradually weakened, and they would, at last, be considered merely as one of the successive movements of eternal matter. On the contrary, if these miracles appeared only at very distant periods, posterior generations would accuse their ancestors, who were witnesses of them, of weakness and credulity; or perhaps they would question the authenticity of those traditions, which transmitted the accounts of revolutions contrary to the common course of nature.

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It may perhaps be still said, That in order to be certain of the existence of a Supreme Being, it would be necessary to demonstrate that the Deity always listens to the prayers addressed to Him. But though our prayers and wishes could constantly influence events in general, Would that be sufficient to change the opinion of those who behold, with indifference, that innumerable multitude of actions which are so miraculously subjected to our will? Would they not still find some pretence for considering such an increase of power, as a necessary result of the eternal system of the universe? Thus, however great were the degree of intelligence granted to us,—however numerous the prodigies accumulated around us, we might still oppose the same objections and the same doubts, that some men have audaciously raised amidst all those wonders which we daily witness. It is difficult, nay even impossible, to make a lasting impression on those men who are only susceptible of astonishment, at the moment when they pass from what is known to what is unknown: For their emotion only continues for an instant; and the endurance of their admiration depends on the slowness of their instruction, or on the continual succession of new phenomena presented to their view. Perhaps we might be more struck with our own powers and faculties, if, in order to make our actions obedient to our will, it were necessary to give our
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our orders repeatedly, and pronounce them with an audible voice, as a captain commands his foldiers: Yet fuch a constitution would be lefs wonderful, becaufe lefs perfect, than that which we poffefs.

Let us now obviate another objection. Some philofophers have faid, That men advance gradually and flowly in their difcoveries of the original principles which regulate the operations of nature: The power of attraction, that great physical agent, has been only known about a century,—and the doctrine of electricity is a more recent difcovery: Every age, indeed every year, adds to the ftore of our knowledge; and the time will perhaps come, when, without having recourfe to any myfterious opinions, we may be enabled to explain all thofe phenomena which, at prefent, fo much aftonifh us.

Thofe who reafon in this manner, do not immediately perceive the neceffity of eftablifhing a firft caufe, from which all the great principles and important truths proceed, that have been already difcovered, or may hereafter enrich the human mind: For the farther we are able to trace the links of the vaft chain which connects the parts of the univerfe, the more we muft extend our view of the magnificent work and power of the Creator. A train of fucceffful labour, may perhaps enable us to difcover fome fecret physical property, of fuperior influence to any
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we already know : But even supposing that all the operations of nature were subjected to a few general laws, and that we were able to discover these laws ; such a result of our enquiries would merely show, that there exists a more extensive unity in the system of nature ; and this simplicity,—this additional character of perfection, would excite, if possible, a higher degree of admiration : For, in a complicated work, such as the world, the simple and regular dependence of the parts, announces the wisdom and skill of the Artist ; and, in no case whatever, can we admire an incoherent mass, where the connection of the parts is every where broken : But by some unaccountable habit, when men have discovered a principle that appears uniform in its action, and have bestowed on it a particular denomination, they inconsiderately conclude that their admiration should then cease. In fact, enquiries into the admirable powers of attraction, electricity, and chemical affinity, are, at present, less the object of pursuit, than the discovery of some means to free us from the admiration due to the stupendous effects of those wonderful properties. Indeed we become habituated to view with indifference, every general effect, and every primary cause, of which we have a conception, without considering that that *very conception* is one of the most surprising phenomena in nature. It may be said, that men, from a familiarity

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with their own minds, condemn what may be easily comprehended : That emulation, and competition with others, can alone stimulate their vanity ; but when they judge of themselves individually, or when they take a general view of mankind, they conceive so mean an opinion of themselves, that every secret which the human mind is able to comprehend, seems no longer worthy of their admiration.

The account of the formation of the earth, which is given by M. BUFFON, may be considered as the most extensive, and the most elegant theory ever offered on that subject. But, supposing it were as just as it is beautiful, it can only enable us to explain *one* of the magnificent combinations in the universe,—*one* gradation of that superb work. I see the earth formed by an emanation from the sun,—I see it become fertile, and teem with animation, in proportion as it is slowly cooled, to a due degree of temperature,—I see all the beauties of nature spring from its bosom ; and what is more wonderful than all, creatures endowed with instinct and intelligence : But if the *elements* of those incomprehensible productions, have been prepared and deposited in the great fountain of light, which animates the world, I must there transfer my astonishment,—and I must still seek for the Author of so many wonders.

I COME now to consider, as briefly as possible, the most metaphysical part of my subject. We might perhaps be able to form some idea of a world existing without beginning, by the laws of blind necessity, were that world fixed and invariable in all its parts: But how shall we consider all those successive changes, which constantly recur, to be eternal? Such a succession is necessarily composed of an end and a beginning; and we cannot, in any other terms, explain the nature of successive change. Thus we are constrained to raise our thoughts to a Self Existing First Cause, when we contemplate a perpetual succession of causes and effects,—of destruction and reproduction,—of death and life. We cannot even imagine the most simple movement to exist without a beginning: For every motion depends on displacing a body from a situation in which it remained *previously* at rest.

It would not remove the difficulty, though it were asserted, that the universe is immoveable,—and that its parts alone are subjected to variation: For a whole of this kind, considered abstractly, without any relation, real or imaginary, to its parts, is a mere ideal circumscription, supposed unsusceptible of change: But this circumscription can only consist of those positive things which are contained within its limits. It is only by studying these, and examining the various parts of the unknown whole, to which we give

the name of the universe, that we can, with certainty, deduce consequences, or form judgments. We have therefore just reason to conclude, from observing the perpetual successions and revolutions in nature, that there must necessarily exist a First Cause.

Here it may be said, that we encounter the same difficulty, by supposing the eternity of a God: For the concatenation of designs in an Intelligent Being, ought to lead to a commencement, as well as the *successions* of the physical world.

This difficulty, like all others whose solution depends on the knowledge of infinity, cannot be easily obviated. It is evident, however, that every physical series conducts us, in a simple and direct manner, to the necessity of a first principle; and that we must not expect to find it in matter, since the properties of material objects can afford us no idea whatever of such a principle. On the contrary, a succession of intellectual combinations may be referred to an origin, which we are able to suppose may be connected, in some way or other, with intelligence. In short, we can readily form a conception of possessing the faculty of thinking, previous to the action of thought; and we may suppose them separated by any possible interval. In this manner, we may be conscious of the intellectual faculty of *liberty*, at a period when we make no
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use of it, and when it remains in a state of absolute inactivity.

I may also add, that if our thoughts are sometimes dependent one on another, yet the series is so often interrupted, that our ideas frequently appear to arise from no cause whatever: On the contrary, in all other productions within our knowledge, there is a constant and immediate relation between the effect and its cause. Nor should we leave out of view, that, when our ideas appear depending on each other, such a succession is rather a consequence of our weakness and ignorance, than of the nature of *thought*, considered in the abstract. Our means being circumscribed, we are obliged to proceed continually from what is known to what is unknown,—from what is probable to what is certain,—from experience of the past, to conjectures on the future: But such a procedure is absolutely foreign to a boundless intelligence, which sees and knows all things at one glance; and perhaps we may, in some measure, find this truth illustrated, even amongst men, when we compare the natural and happy facility of true genius, with the painful and unavailing struggles of dulness.

In short, those persons who are convinced of the existence of a God, need not transport themselves, if I may use the expression, beyond the domain of thought, in order to find proofs to

support their opinion; Atheists alone need to make such wild excursions; since they alone wish to resist the influence of our most intimate feelings, and most natural ideas,—since they bid us mistrust the distinct connection we perceive between the Supreme Intelligence and the perfection of order,—between a first principle, and a series of causes and effects,—between the idea of a God and all the propensities of the soul: These obvious considerations are the sure foundation of our opinions. Thus we still retain the advantage, though it were true, that, when we strive to ascend the inaccessible heights of metaphysics, our adversaries were on an equal footing with us.

Pursuing this simple train of thought, and desirous to treat my subject with such a degree of perspicuity as to render these reflections of general utility, I decline entering on a further discussion of the various theories that have been advanced with regard to the creation of the world. It suffices, that, in general, I perceive the idea of a *creation* to be no more incomprehensible than that of the *eternity* of the universe. The last hypothesis, no doubt, renders it unnecessary to conceive that *something* has been produced by *nothing*; but the substitution of an *eternal existence*, in place of *nothing*, is, in every respect, as perplexing to the imagination. For the mind, being unable to reach the thought of eternity, must
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ever place it amidst a vacuity, when attempting to comprehend it. In the system of a Created Universe, we see *something* proceed from *nothing*, by an *Intelligent Will*, of which we can form a clear idea ; but in the system of an Eternal Universe, we can only get rid of this *nothing*, by means of an abstraction which overpowers all our faculties. Indeed, both these modes of existence seem to be placed, as it were, in a boundless void, beyond the reach of the human mind : And if we sometimes fancy, that the eternal existence of the universe is a more agreeable thought than its creation, the only reason appears to be, that such a supposition excludes all examination, and supercedes the use of all our reasoning powers.

The idea of a God the Creator of the universe, is no doubt equally *above* our intelligence : But we are led towards it by all our most intimate feelings ; and those obstacles which we encounter in our endeavours to reach this grand idea, we can readily ascribe to the *will* of that Omnipotent Being for whom we search. On the contrary, in the dull and uniform path of the *eternal existence of the universe*, we are immediately oppressed with despair, when we find it impossible to discover the nature of things, yet cannot suspect that there is a veil interposed to conceal it from our investigation.

I will add a few more observations. We behold a faint resemblance of the creation, in the

continual reproduction of the rich fruits of the earth. Our moral nature affords a more striking representation of it, in the formation of ideas which had no antecedent existence. Our feelings are another indication of the same truth; for they have no evident connection with any of the causes to which we assign them: Thus, were we not influenced by habit, we would perceive as wide a difference between particular exterior occurrences, and the correspondent feelings they excite, as between the existence of the world and the idea of an Infinite and Omnipotent Power.

We also perceive that the universe bears all the evident marks of a *Work*,—the characteristic of which is, The union of a multitude of parts, whose relations are determined agreeably to one general plan. In short, even the succession of time suggests the existence of an intelligent cause: For how can we reconcile such a succession with the eternity of nature? We can conceive no different periods in an extent which has no beginning; since each of these periods must comprehend an infinite space. Besides, the want of a beginning, considered abstractly, renders intermediate subdivisions impossible; for we can form no ideas of any such subdivisions, without two determinate limits, with the one of which we may begin, and terminate with the other. Thus the introduction of past, present and future, amidst
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the perpetuity of time, seems to be the operation of an Intelligent Power, who has planned this immense uniformity, and who governs the universal nature of things.

I need not dwell longer on these reflections ; for it is unnecessary to conceive of the creation, or of the nature of things, in a metaphysical sense, in order to establish the basis of our religious principles : It is sufficient that we believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, the Ruler of Nature,—the perfect Model of Wisdom and Goodness,—the Protector and Guardian of rational beings,—and the Universal Disposer of all events. Our reasoning powers become enfeebled, when we endeavour to stretch our thoughts too far, and strive to explain those secrets, that lie concealed beyond our sphere of knowledge. In that case, we can only oppose the adversaries of Religion, by presenting, as it were, the slender extremity of our arguments,—the last feeble exertion of reasoning, when exhausted by its own efforts. It will then be better to rely on such principles as may be defended by the joint force of our reason and feelings. Let us not hesitate to confess, that our noblest faculties are restrained by certain and invariable limits : One degree more of intellectual power, would perhaps diffuse a sudden light over those difficulties which at present appear quite insuperable. There are few persons, habituated to deep thought, who
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have not, perhaps, experienced a præ-sentiment of this truth : For the imagination sometimes discovers, as it were, the first glimmerings of a new percipient power, which, we fondly imagine, could we advance but one step farther, would be within our reach ; but after vainly grasping at it, our hope fails, and we must return to a humble sense of our weakness. Alas ! in that infinite space through which our imagination ranges, we find only a boundless waste, where the mind discovers no haven, no place of repose. One may fancy, that the celestial guards have desolated those regions, that no audacious traveller may ever hope to pass their bourne. But shall we venture to assert, that the mysteries of nature cease, at the point where our intelligence terminates ? Would we presumptuously dare to enter into the secrets of time, by ascribing eternal existence to every thing we know ! How vain-glorious, how insignificant do we appear, when we, who are creatures of a moment, arrogantly pretend to decide on those things which pertain to eternity !

It seems indeed, very probable, that the degree of reason we possess, is not sufficient to attain the explanation of those mysteries which curiosity leads us to investigate. The long series of animated beings inferior to us, to all of whom our intellectual faculties are unknown, may afford us a strong analogous proof of this fact :

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And it must appear strange, that though we distinctly perceive the boundaries of our senses, we never reflect that our *intelligence*, which we fancy to be boundless, may, notwithstanding, be really circumscribed within certain limits. The imagination, indeed, often goes beyond the known bounds of nature : But we are unable to advance farther than the entrance of that domain which must be explored, before we can penetrate the occult secrets of nature : We cannot, however, doubt, that some Intelligence must exist, capable of comprehending all these mysteries. Omniscience must be at the top of this scale of intelligence—at the summit of this gradation, which we are permitted, in part, to trace. We can only gain knowledge, and make discoveries, by the help of experiment and observation, and we only judge of nature from the narrow fore-ground exposed to our view. But shall we therefore suppose, that no other mode of acquiring knowledge exists in the universe ? Men, in forming *their* judgments and opinions, very much resemble children ; and their weakness and ignorance ought continually to remind them that they need a *Father* and a *Guide*. We also see that all the phenomena of nature are related to one great whole,—all its various productions united to some general cause. The same thing may be observed of the human soul ; but, more admirable than the rays of the sun, it is an emanation from the purest light,—from the

the Divine Mind. In short, since we know that space and time have no bounds, yet see that they are subjected to division, Why shall we not believe, that the small degree of knowledge we possess, may be a part of a Universal Intelligence?

THE weakest of all objections against the belief of the existence of a God, is, in my opinion, that which has been founded on the common remark, That human life is chequered with pain and pleasure. A God, say the opposers of Religion, ought to be incapable of the smallest imperfection; and we cannot believe in his existence, while we perceive any limits to his power and goodness.

This is a very feeble argument: For, while they refuse to admit the evidence of the existence of a God, afforded by the wisdom, harmony and intelligence displayed in the system of the universe, What right have they to avail themselves of an imaginary contrast, between *infinite power* and *infinite goodness*, in order to attribute the formation of the world to the caprice of chance, or to the laws of blind necessity? Would it be reasonable to consider the defects of a work, as an evidence against the existence of the artist, while the beauties of that work are not admitted as a proof of a contrary opinion? Indeed, if we would argue justly, we must absolutely invert this mode of reasoning;
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for disorder and imperfection being merely a negation of certain qualities, unless the whole appears defective, we cannot reject the idea of an intelligent cause; on the contrary, in order to confirm our belief of such a cause, it is sufficient that one part of the object we contemplate, announces art and design. Thus, while we view a palace, if we discover in the composition some evident marks of ingenuity, we immediately attribute these to the skill of the architect; though we may, at the same time, observe other parts of the edifice, in which no beauty nor invention appear.

We have already shown to what absurd extremes we may be carried, by attempting to reconcile infinite Power with infinite Goodness; and we need not dwell much longer on that subject. We have seen that there can be no hypothesis proposed, nor even conceived, after which we might not say, That infinite Power ought to have produced something more perfect. Some ideas appear contradictory in our judgment, only because our mind cannot comprehend their whole extent; and we find this observation verified, not only when we contemplate things foreign to our nature, but even when we consider those things with which we are daily conversant: But how contemptible do men appear, when they pretend to confine within their narrow comprehension, the greatest and most unlimited of all thoughts?

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Will they presume to employ the idea of infinite Power, to overturn our belief of infinite Goodness,—the idea of infinite Wisdom, to abolish the existence of infinite Power? By the notion of *infinite chance* too, men have invented many absurd theories with regard to the formation of the world. Thus, they would employ infinity for every purpose, but that of placing over us a Supreme Intelligence, possessing an essence and properties beyond the reach of our reason.

Since our thoughts are lost in a boundless maze, as soon as we attempt to surpass the limits of our intellectual faculties; when we wish to call up all the powers and feelings of our soul, to awake in our heart, a lively conviction of the existence of a God, we ought, by no means, to exhaust our strength in following mere subtilities, or in vainly endeavouring to acquire a full and precise idea of the various attributes of that Infinite Being, who has permitted us to know Him, by His works, in a certain degree, and no further. It would, indeed, be rather hard, thus to oblige persons who believe in and adore a God, to defend themselves, both against those who deny His existence, and those who idly dispute about the nature of His perfections. I am far from supposing that any obstacle could be opposed to the Divine Will;—but though I were convinced that there exists a certain order, and certain laws in the universe, which the Deity can modify, but not entirely

entirely subvert, yet still I would retain my present sentiments of Religion. I would no less adore the Supreme Being, if I should find reason to think, that, though in him all perfections were constantly united, he yet chose to advance the happiness of his creatures, only by slow degrees. I would silently venerate those secrets that elude my penetration, and humbly wait for the time when those clouds may be dispelled, with which they are at present enveloped. What! some may here exclaim, Do you still talk of ignorance and obscurity? Yes, always,—and such will ever be the lot of those who attempt to surpass the limits prescribed by the immutable laws of nature. But such truths as we can clearly perceive and comprehend, are fully sufficient to regulate our conduct, and direct our paths to happiness. Every thing indicates, every thing announces, **THAT THERE IS A GOD**; though we can neither discover the mystery of His essence, nor the relations of His perfections. We see, at a distance, the monarch surrounded by his guards,—we know his laws, and enjoy the advantages they produce; but we enter not into his counsels, nor are we made acquainted with his deliberations. We even perceive that an impenetrable veil covers from us the designs of the Supreme Being; and since we can never hope to remove it, let us repose with confidence on the protection of that Eternal Being, who is infinitely

finitely Powerful and Good,—let us commit ourselves to Him, as we would to a friend, who, while we stood, amidst profound darkness, upon the brink of a hideous precipice, should rescue us from destruction, and soothe our terror.

If we may venture, with reverence, to make the comparison, we might say, that the Deity is like the Sun, on which we cannot gaze stedfastly; but when we turn aside our looks, we enjoy the benefit of that light which he diffuses throughout all nature. Yet man, who, from a consciousness of his ignorance and incapacity, can only approach the Supreme Being, by veneration and awful respect, ought, on that account, to be more deeply impressed with a sense of His Infinite Majesty. The force of the lever is always greatest when it is acted on at the furthest extremity.

The universal assent of mankind, in all nations and in all ages, must be allowed to afford a strong presumptive evidence of the existence of a God: But the full force of this proof cannot be perceived, unless we consider, as an established law of our moral nature, that instinctive tendency towards this sublime thought, which seems so constantly remarkable in the human mind, notwithstanding the immense disparity of knowledge and capacity amongst mankind. This leads us to conclude, that, amid the obscurity in which the idea of a God is involved,
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our internal feelings become our surest guide. These, I confess, form that part of our moral nature which appears to be least dependent on reason ; but such innate perceptions seem to me, on that account, to have the most immediate communication with the Author of Nature.

Sight excels our other senses, by its amazing celerity ; but imagination is still more active, and carries us farther than sight. Imagination, however, is obliged to trace out for itself a path ; and is therefore inferior to our intuitive perceptions and feelings, which, without any intermediate aid, bring us directly to the point.

The efforts of reasoning to reach profound metaphysical truths, may be considered as a chain of which the links succeed, but are not connected with each other ; because the mind of man is incapable, in such researches, of comprehending the multitude of ideas, which must be united before a just conclusion can be attained. Our feelings are then best suited to conduct us in our search after those sublime truths, which are, in their nature, simple and indivisible, and can be most readily apprehended at one view. Besides, while he who possesses erudition and a refined genius, often wanders in the labyrinths of metaphysics, and pursues vain speculations, the plain and upright man, who is still governed by the laws of nature, feels the belief of a Supreme Being, spontaneously spring up in his breast. Thus sensibi-

lity as well as intelligence announces to us the existence of a Supreme Being ; and we cannot know Him without loving Him. This union, then, of all our faculties to that sublime idea, which seems to be instinctive, ought to be referred to a first cause ; for there must certainly exist a first model of all things, since nothing proceeds absolutely from ourselves.

It may, perhaps, be an innate, though indistinct, perception of this first model, that always reminds us of religious sentiments, when we contemplate any uncommon example of eminent virtue. Were it not for the pleasing hopes and agreeable reflections, which excite in our breasts a deep and heartfelt admiration, the unhappy theories of philosophers might unhinge, or even destroy all our best principles : But in vain would they attempt to persuade us, that sensibility is the accidental production of blind matter. All we feel within us declares it to have a nobler origin. Ah ! who sees not amidst all these wonderful properties of man, the grandeur of the soul,—the elevation of genius,—the expansive glow of sensibility,—the constant love of order, and gentle benevolence,—who sees not, in this brilliant group, the reflection of a divine light ! On contemplating this prospect, who can doubt, that there somewhere exists a source of all this greatness, beauty and intelligence ! Could rays appear without a fountain of light ? While I pursue such a train of
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thought, I sometimes fancy that that exalted virtue, which we must all admire, may be, as it were, the first step towards bringing intelligent creatures to the knowledge of the Sovereign Author of Nature ; and when such admirable virtue is found united in certain persons with a love and pre-sentiment of the divine nature, that union irresistibly commands our respect and veneration. Thus, every good and sublime sentiment seems to be awaked, when we form an idea of the soul of SOCRATES or FENELON.

From a similar cause, we feel regret, when we reflect, that some ingenious men are enemies to these sublime ideas,—men who wish rather to debase themselves, and all nature beside, by attributing their origin to chance or blind necessity, than to consider their intellectual faculties as a faint shadow of Sovereign Intelligence. Thus, instead of employing their abilities to support and fortify these comfortable truths, they are assiduous in opposing them ; and endeavour to embarrass, by subtle arguments, those simple instructions which tend to cherish our first and most natural hopes. They seem, of their own accord, if we may speak so, to wish rather to materialize themselves, than to exalt their minds, and lead us by their ingenuity into the paths of hope and felicity. They will only grant eternity to the *dust* from which, they say, they are sprung, but will not allow it to *mind* and *thought*.

What honour do they expect to derive from this superior knowledge of which they boast, if it be only the result of an accretion of parts, like the growth of plants,—if our intellectual faculties, instead of being intimately connected with an Infinite Intelligence, and a noble destiny, are altogether dependent on this frail structure, this slender fabric, which is every moment exposed to the hazard of dissolution? What glory can we expect from those faculties, if they can extend no farther than the small, the imperceptible point of time, between our birth and our death,—if they can only exalt us above our fellow mortals during the short period of human life,—that instant which will be soon lost in the immensity of ages, like the fleeting vapour amid the expanse of air? Ah! how can we boast of fame, precedence and high birth, while we would voluntarily renounce the grandeur of the noblest origin? Can we be proud of the celebrity of our country, the honour of our nation, and the renown of our family, and shall we, at the same time, reject the only true dignity of our nature, which extends to the whole human race?

In short, I would ask every one who possesses the smallest share of sensibility, By what strange deviation of imagination it is, that he can possibly carry his scruples with regard to the existence of a Deity farther than mere *doubt*? For we feel that our only guide and support in all our deter-

determinations, is our intelligence, of which the weakness and fallibility is every moment so obvious. That intelligence is also capable of gradual improvement, and of making constant new acquisitions. Now, as there is no proportion between the degree of our intelligence and the profound mysteries of nature, we every where behold, How can we boldly assert, that men have already arrived at the ultimate perfection of science? How shall we venture to affirm, that nothing exists, or can exist, through eternity, superior in penetration to our weak reason?

However, supposing even that we should despair of advancing farther in metaphysics, and that we still find the proofs of the existence of a God to be insufficient, Is there any other system which is not more involved in obscurity, and which does not terminate in doubt? But have we considered the effect of simple *probability*, when applied to sublime and boundless ideas? Let us figure to ourselves, a circumstance equally probable, on which the most interesting occurrence of our present life absolutely depends, and we may conceive what effect that degree of probability ought to have, in the proportion of finite to infinite. Thus, not merely a probability, but the slightest presumption, of the existence of a God, ought to satisfy men of sense, that it is proper for mankind to embrace a system of religion. Yes, even amidst their doubts, they might

offer up this humble prayer: ‘O thou God
 ‘ unknown! whose image is impressed on our
 ‘ hearts,—whose existence we constantly feel to
 ‘ be essentially necessary to our happiness,—If
 ‘ Thou ART,—if Thou reignest in Heaven,—if
 ‘ it is Thy hand which supports, and thy wisdom
 ‘ which regulates the universe, deign to accept
 ‘ our love and humble homage.’——

These reflections might be sufficient to impress with reverential awe, weak beings who are unknown to themselves,—who search every where for their own origin,—who possess so many desires and hopes, and who absolutely need some fixed and ruling principle to support their imbecillity, and to serve as an anchor amidst the waverings and agitations of their minds.

Because the period appears distant, at which every difficulty will be explained, many persons exaggerate their doubts, and even confound them with decided unbelief. Let us, however, imagine a time to be appointed, when the inhabitants of the earth shall be solemnly called together, and instructed in the mysteries of their present existence and of futurity: Let us suppose, that the day for this instruction were signalized by some phenomenon which might rouse our attention: At such a moment, I am certain, that those men who are now, in appearance, most averse to religious sentiments, would suffer the utmost uneasiness and anxiety, and would soon
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feel, that what they formerly considered as their true sentiments, was only a wavering opinion, externally propped up by vain glory, and a desire of distinction.

While I form this judgment of the pretended incredulity of certain persons, I will venture to say, that an unfounded and superficial belief in the existence of a God, and in the truths which depend on that great thought, has often less effect on the mind, than even *doubt*, when restrained within due bounds : And were the limits of such doubts exactly ascertained, the religious sentiments of one class of society, might, by that means, acquire more force and stability.

Here it may be objected, That this doubt, which so many persons have found irresistible, may be considered as an argument against the belief of a God. For, say the opposers of religion, an Infinitely Powerful Being should have been able to inspire a general and complete conviction of this important truth ; there was no need of having recourse to miracles, or employing any supernatural means,—His will should have sufficed.

I confess, that we may easily imagine several degrees of intelligence and happiness superior to our own : But that faculty of our nature, the motive of which is unknown to us, can never be considered as averse to the belief of a God. Every moral and physical power we possess is circumscribed by certain limits ; but, far beyond these,

we, every moment, perceive within us the work of Supreme Intelligence, and the traces of a divine hand : In short, we perceive enough to decide our opinion ; since the vague reasonings, founded on a supposition of what we *might be*, can never be opposed to the clear and distinct inferences we deduce from a consideration of what we *really are*.

The Laplander, who dwells amid perpetual snow, when, perchance, he hears from his cave, the rolling of distant thunder, can say, *That God still lives on the high mountain* ; and shall we, who possess all the riches of nature, and all the light of philosophy, reject the belief of a Supreme Being ? What perversion, what abuse of our reason ! O Infinity ! incomprehensible thought, which must overwhelm the greatest and most daring genius ! it belongs to thee, O Infinity ! to instruct men how diffident they ought to be of their own judgment. Ah ! what can they do better, than fall prostrate before the Great Master of the World, and trace, with fervour and humble admiration, that astonishing chain of wonders and of beauties, which seems intended to conduct them to the knowledge of the Author of Nature ? What can they do better, in short, than aspire to the sublime idea of a God, and strive with all their might to confirm their belief of that opinion, which is not only the most probable, but also the most interesting, the most exalted,

exalted, and the happiest of all ? Alas ! were we ever to lose it,—Who can bear the thought ? a horrid gloom would invest our feelings, and a dismal, an eternal silence, would seem to cover the face of nature. In vain would we look for a protector or a guide,—in vain would we seek a foundation for our hopes ; but this is not all, a dreadful thought still strikes me, which I forbear for a moment to communicate :—I think, however, that religious sentiments acquire a new degree of strength, by demonstrating, that principles repugnant to those opinions, conduct us to conclusions directly contrary to our most intimate feelings, and that before we can adopt such principles, we must, in a manner, change our nature. I will therefore conclude this chapter with a reflection of the highest importance, and worthy of our most serious attention.

If there be no God,—if the whole universe be only the production of chance, or if nature be eternal,—and if this nature be blind, and void of consciousness, without any supreme guide or director,—in short, if all its movements be the effect of its own secret properties, a terrific thought alarms our imagination : We would not merely renounce all the charms of hope, and behold the hideous image of death and annihilation advancing towards us,—these dreadful anticipations would not terminate our terrors : In short, the
 revolutions

revolutions of blind matter being absolutely precarious, and less a subject of probable conjecture than the designs of an Intelligent Being, we could never discover any certain foundation on which we might rest the destiny of man. It would be impossible to guess, whether by some imperious laws of nature, intelligent beings might not be devoted to irrevocable perdition, or destined to revive under some other form,—whether they might hereafter experience unknown pleasures or eternal pains: Death or life, happiness or misery, equally belong to blind nature, when its action is directed by no intelligent moral principle, but merely dependent on the dark property, which is expressed by that terrible, though inexplicable word, *necessity*. Such a nature would resemble the rocks, to which Prometheus was bound, in the fable, that were as insensible to the agonizing groans of the unhappy sufferer, as to the joy of the rapacious vultures who preyed on his vitals.

In such a system, there would be nothing to fix our opinion with regard to futurity. We might fancy the heavenly fires to be places destined for the reception of unhappy animated beings, where, O horrible thought! by some revolution of blind nature, eternal torments might become our sad, our cruel portion.

The momentary experience of present life might perhaps afford us some small degree of hope

hope and comfort ; but what avails observations made in this short space, when applied to eternity ? What avails a hope only founded on a fleeting breath ? Would the fluttering insect, whose duration is but for a day, dare to consider that day as perfectly representing the eternal condition of the universe ? The mixture of pains and pleasures which men experience in this world, can be no immediate indication of what may exist in futurity : For uniformity, equality and likeness, the only proper foundation of our conjectures on futurity, are connected with general ideas of order and harmony : But such ideas are noways applicable to a nature subjected to the laws of blind necessity.

We, no doubt, find it difficult, and sometimes impossible to ascertain the designs of the Supreme Being ; yet by a sort of analogy, we can often, in some measure, perceive the divine will. Our senses, our feelings, and all our intellectual powers come to aid us in the pursuit. But if we are the offspring of blind nature, we could have no relation with its different parts ; and the study of our moral constitution could by no means instruct us in the various changes of which the material world is susceptible. We could only discover, that there is much less reason to oppose imaginary limits to the blind action of unguided nature, than, in part, to circumscribe within certain bounds, the operations of an Omnipotent

tent Being, whose attributes are nevertheless infinite: For the ideas of order and justice and goodness, which arise from a knowledge of the divine perfections, seem, as it were, to mark out a circle amidst infinity, which the mind of man is able to trace: Yes, those sublime ideas expand and elevate our thoughts: But what would such reflections avail, were we only to investigate the mysteries of inert matter, and the laws of blind necessity?

Let me then repeat, as a termination of these reflections, that all would be obscure, all would be at random, so to speak, in the fate of man, if we could not attribute the order and disposition of the world, to the will and the power of an Intelligent Being, whose perfections are faintly represented by our own intellectual faculties.

In short, though in the system of the eternal existence of matter, men were assured that death is a certain cessation of their individual existence, and that they could divest themselves of every idea of its renewal, by any possible means, yet it would not follow, that we should become indifferent about the torments of sentient beings, who may exist through eternity. The metaphysical notion of our identity, or what we call *myself*, or *ourselves*, depending on that imperceptible and mysterious point, which unites our present and past ideas, ought not to make us regardless of every other destiny, or render us indiffer-

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ent to the unknown effects that may result from these revolutions of nature, with which we are unacquainted. The anxieties and troubles of those beings who are to live in succeeding ages, do not absolutely interest us as individuals; yet we cannot avoid sensibly feeling for them a sort of abstract sympathy, not easily to be described.

I admit, that in the system of chance and unguided nature, happiness and misery, whether temporary or eternal, have the same degree of probability: But what a dreadful equality! Can we, without alarm, consider the risk of such a chance?

How, then, can the enemies of Religion pretend, that Atheism frees us from all fear of futurity? I do not perceive that any thing in this fatal system can produce such an effect. The belief of a God, such as my heart naturally represents, affords me encouragement, and quiets all my feelings. I contemplate Him as good,—indulgent,—acquainted with my weakness,—and ready to grant me happiness: Thus I can see death advance without terror, and sometimes with joyful hope. But every fear, every apprehension is reasonable, if I am subjected to blind nature, whose laws and revolutions are unknown to me. In vain do I seek for means to escape from its power: Neither darkness nor death afford me a retreat; nor can I find an asylum in
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the immensity of space, nor in eternity itself. I look every where in vain for compassion and goodness; for in this blind eternity, there is no source of intelligence,—unguided nature and chance imperiously govern all. Vainly do I ask this *nature*, what destiny awaits me,—it is deaf to my voice. Devoid of will, design and sentiment, it is governed by an irresistible *necessity*, whose action is the most incomprehensible of all mysteries. Ah! what an origin, what a cruel parent would this *nature* be, so indifferent to its own offspring! How dreadful to the human mind would be the destruction of every primitive idea of order, of justice, and of goodness? I must add, that though I were convinced that the gates of futurity were for ever shut against me, I would be less unhappy and forlorn, were I to commit to a Father, to a Benefactor, the deposit of a life which I hold from Him. This last communication with the Ruler of nature, would mitigate my sufferings. I would behold his power, ere my eyes were for ever closed,—and I should, at least, hope, that God remained the protector of those I loved; it would be some comfort that my destiny was united to his will,—that my existence, and the labours I had undergone, would form one indelible point of His eternal remembrance; and that the incomprehensible nonentity into which I was going to plunge, was still a part of his Empire. But were

a feeling and elevated soul, which had sometimes experienced a sense of its own grandeur, to know with certainty, that by a blind movement, it was to be dissipated in that dreary void,—sunk in that dark abyss, where all that is vile or mean on earth is equally precipitated,—such a thought would preclude every noble ambition, check every virtue, and be a continual source of sadness and despair.

O save us from that dreadful thought, thou sublime and happy idea of a God! Afford us courage and comfort, and grant us the consolation and hope for which we seek. Guard our minds from those fatal phantoms,—those vain suppositions, and sophistical reasonings, which have been interposed, to render man a stranger to his Creator. Let us, reposing on the first instructions of nature, take our intimate feeling for our guide,—that interior sentiment, which is neither *thought* nor *reason*, but greater than both, and which perhaps forms the closest connection, the most certain communication, with those sublime truths, that the mind, of itself, can never reach.



C H A P. XV.

On the Respect that is due from true Philosophy to Religion.

OUR senses, and our reason, and our feelings, all concur to strengthen our belief in the existence of a God : And, without being able to comprehend this Infinite Being, or to form a just idea of His essence and perfections, a general, though awful sense of His greatness, and the constant experience of our own weakness, are the predominant motives, which, in all countries, and in all ages, have impelled mankind to worship a God. These natural ideas have acquired new force by the light of Revelation. But in a philosophical work, such as the present, it would be improper to enter on a discussion of the authenticity of the Christian Religion ; nor could we add any thing new to the doctrines contained in the multiplicity of books composed at different periods on this important subject. Every discussion, whose circumstances depend on the truth of certain facts, must necessarily be circumscribed

circumscribed within precise limits; and we are obliged to fall into the common track, when we wish to pursue a path so long beaten. I will therefore confine myself to a few general reflections, such as may be most suited to the genius of the present age, and to the turn which our sentiments have acquired from the now prevailing opinions: For our opinions, like our ideas, constantly vary according to the changes which insensibly take place in the manners and custom of the nation. One period is remarkable for intolerance and bigotry,—another for carelessness and indifference,—another for a haughty contempt of ancient customs; every age, every generation, is distinguished by a particular character; and this change of character, which is sometimes imagined to be the effect of new ideas, is, for most part, no more than the natural consequence of the extravagance of former opinions. Men are subjected to moral laws, in some respects similar to those of mechanics, and, amidst all their boasted knowledge, they often remind us of children at play, who, placing themselves on the extremity of a long balance, successively rise and descend. None but moderate sentiments can keep their ground for any length of time, because these are supported by their own force; all others have a borrowed action, and this action can never be in perfect equilibrium with truth.

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Every sort of revelation must, from its nature, appear less evident to the mind, in proportion as the proofs of its authenticity are distant. And if some dogmas of a particular religious doctrine, contain a mystical sense,—if the modes of worship adopted by the governors of Church and State, should sometimes appear not altogether consonant with the majestic idea we must form of the Great Ruler of the universe, we cannot think it extraordinary, that the various parts of these religious institutions, should give rise to controversies and divisions in opinion ; neither should we be exasperated at those who, after a candid examination, still retain some doubts. Since God has thought proper only to manifest Himself to us, in proportion to our degree of understanding, the exercise of our intellectual faculties can surely never be displeasing to him : But enlightened reason, and what deserves the appellation of true philosophy, does by no means favour the smallest contempt for religious worship in general, or for those respectable sentiments, of which Christianity is the support. Every doctrine which leads to the adoration of the God of the universe, merits the respect of His creatures. Such persons, therefore, as are most disposed to contest the authenticity of the Scriptures, should still have some regard to those precepts, which seem calculated to aid the human mind in the
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last efforts it can make towards the knowledge of a God,—like the friendly bark presented to the perishing wretch, who, amid the boundless ocean, vainly endeavours to force his way by his own feeble arm.

Every one must perceive, that the sentiments of respect and gratitude towards a God, which are impressed on the most enlightened mind, are in perfect correspondence with the evangelical doctrines contained in the New Testament : And at those moments, when our desire of happiness is checked by that natural timidity which arises from contrasting infinite greatness with our own insignificance,—infinite power with our own weakness,—the view of the divine perfections afforded by the Gospel, encourages our hopes, and dispels our fears. Rational Religion teaches us to look above this world for protection against all the miseries of our condition, by pointing out to us Sovereign Mercy and Infinite Goodness. The Christian doctrines conduct us to the same end : So that, Religion and true philosophy are at one in their highest, their ultimate period.

Thus, the professor of Religion and the Deist, unite in adoring the same exalted object ; and also agree, when they turn their attention to civil society and the moral duties. For every wise man must pay homage to the morality of the Gospel : Since no philosophy could devise a system of morals more rational, or better suited

to the situation of mankind *. Since we thus see opinions apparently the most opposite, meet, as it were, in their extremities,—since we see, that the worship of God, and respect for morality, united, form the tenor of the Evangelical doctrines, Why should the rational philosopher be offended, because Christians place their faith intermediately between these grand ideas? If he thinks he can, of himself, surpass the barrier placed betwixt man and his Creator, Why should he, on that account, inveterately reprobate the sentiments of those who are attached to the comfortable system of intercession and redemption?

In short, were we even not to agree with many of the doctrines taught by the interpreters of Christianity, that would be no sufficient motive for breaking that alliance which Religion maintains amongst mankind, and which is supported, in every nation, by the mode of public worship made choice of by Government. What a mean idea would we have of the genius and abilities of that philosopher, who, on observing particular ceremonies, mysteries, or modes of worship, which appear to him exceptionable, could not rise superior to his disgust, and consider them to be, as it were, the atmosphere of religious opinions,—and who, even independent of these opinions, does not preserve a sacred regard
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* I will offer some reflections on this subject in another chapter.

for the whole dependencies of the most sublime and most salutary of all thoughts? It is easy, however, to perceive, that, to the greater part of men, moral duties, religious principles, and all the exterior homage rendered to the Deity, compose a whole so strictly connected, that we are in danger of shaking the foundation of the edifice, when we attack the exterior parts. The imagination of the vulgar cannot be treated in the same manner as that of the contemplative genius; and it is a great mistake to think, that popular opinions may be influenced by the same arguments we would employ to convince a man of profound thought. There is a certain system of proportion, suited to the various faculties of intelligent beings, in the same manner, as there are certain degrees of proportion applicable to physical objects.

Nothing, then, can be more foolish, than the inconsiderate censure of such religious ceremonies as are allowed and respected in the country where one lives. Some people fancy that there is no harm in speaking disrespectfully of public worship; but, were they to observe attentively the temper and habits of those to whom they address such discourse, they must immediately perceive, how easily they might injure those sentiments which are the source of their tranquillity, and the safeguard of their moral conduct. The deliverer of Switzerland struck off, with his

arrow, an apple placed on the head of his only son : But who can expect to equal his dexterity and his good fortune.

Let it not be attempted to controvert the truth of these observations, by alleging, that several eminent men have made very rapid innovations on the forms and ceremonies of the Roman Church, without weakening the religious spirit of the nations, in which these reforms have been adopted. The causes, the circumstances and the consequences of those revolutions, which make so great a figure in history, are in no shape connected with the present question. The reformers of the sixteenth century, whilst they preached their new doctrines, made open profession of religious zeal and fervent piety. Thus, although they disapproved of some parts of the established worship, yet, they recommended a rigid adherence to the fundamental principles of Christianity, and even endeavoured to introduce a severity of morals, which prohibited many pleasures that were not formerly forbidden ; and, indeed, had not the new doctrines implied a profound respect for the fundamental principles of Christianity, they never could have attracted so many followers.

There is then no sort of comparison between the censures of the reformers, and the ironical and contemptuous discourse of those men who at present insult our most sacred opinions.

Such

RELIGIOUS OPINIONS. 311.

Such persons now, alas! too numerous, are sometimes prompted by mere licentiousness, sometimes by vanity, and the enthusiasm of a false philosophy, and sometimes by pride, and the vain-glorious ostentation of conducting themselves by principles entirely their own. There is indeed a great difference between the serious and steady procedure of the reformers, and the versatility of the busy opponents of Religion. The latter do not stop to clear up some point of doctrine, or to dispute the interpretation of some precept,—they aim at Religion itself; and if they begin with attacking the outworks, it is with a view to undermine the whole structure. They artfully avail themselves of every advantage, by watching opportunities, when they may seasonably employ a tone of ironical pleasantry; and this is the more dangerous, as it gives a turn of gaiety, and an air of confidence to their discourse, by which they acquire a sort of ascendancy, and endeavour to shun the possibility of entering on an equal combat. By this means, some people are so weak as to be persuaded, that it is through contempt, that the enemies of Religion thus pass slightly over the subject, and on that supposition, submit, in a servile manner, to their affected superiority; so that what is, in fact, merely feebleness and ignorance on their part, bestows consequence on them, in the eyes of their inconsiderate admirers.

Mankind, in order to express their gratitude to the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, and to elevate their thoughts to Him, will naturally have recourse to every thing grand and majestic, which imagination can suggest. Therefore, when we divest those tokens of reverence, of the idea they are meant to represent and preserve, we can only see in them a vain shew of solemnity, a mere chimerical pomp. Such a contrast may readily afford a subject of ridicule; but those who treat the matter in this way, far from displaying any ingenuity, only make a mean attempt to insult the common opinions of the greater part of mankind, who habitually respect every system of devout worship offered to the Supreme Being.

A sort of bold and frivolous discourse against Religion in general, has been, of late, so prevalent, and has made such a gradual, though strong impression, that, at present, even such persons as respect religious sentiments in a just and liberal manner, and free of all vain parade, are obliged to conceal their opinions in public, lest they should be exposed to a sort of contemptuous pity, or be suspected of hypocrisy. We are at liberty to converse on every subject, except the greatest and most interesting which can occupy the human mind. What strange authority has that imperious legislation obtained amongst us, which goes by the name of *good breeding* and *fashion*!

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What a miserable conspiracy is that of weakness against Omnipotence ! Men are proud of knowing at what hour the king wakes, goes to the chace, or returns,—they are eager to be informed of all the mean intrigues which elevate or degrade his courtiers ; in short, they pass their whole lives in panting after the objects of vanity and the badges of slavery : These are the constant topics of their conversation ; while they reprobate, under the appellation of a vulgar taste, the smallest or most remote expression, which might recal the ideas of the admirable and harmonious universe, or of its Supreme Author, who has bestowed on us so many blessings. Thus we overlook what is by far most excellent in our interior nature,—in that *self* of which we are so fond, in order to fix our attention solely on those objects of vanity, with which we are so foolishly puffed up. How ungrateful, then, is this conduct, since we see that our intelligence, our will, and our senses, proceed not from ourselves, and that our existence and all our faculties are the seal of an unknown power ! We thus, as it were, bear the badge of our Master and Benefactor, and yet shall we be restrained from pronouncing his name ? To you subtile sophisters, we must impute this false shame,—to you who have first audaciously branded with unjust contempt the most estimable sentiments,—to you who, by employing in the dispute, the nimble and piercing shafts

shafts of ridicule, have given confidence to the weakest and most frivolous of men, of whom a numerous tribe, of every rank and age, have become your disciples. Thus, we often remark among those who affect to treat religious principles with supercilious derision, a multitude of inexperienced and giddy youth, who are, perhaps, incapable of supporting the most trivial argument, or even of connecting two or three abstract propositions. The opposers of Religion have thus, with a perfidious art, taken advantage of the first dawn of *pride* and *self-love*, to persuade those novices, that they can determine, at a glance, those profound questions which men of the highest ability have never been able to resolve. Indeed, such is the audacious language and decisive tone of the opponents of Religion, in the present age, that while we hear them murmur so loudly against the dispositions of Providence, we are only surprised to see how much they differ in stature from those rebellious giants, in the fable, who ventured to brave Heaven, and scale Olympus.

I believe, however, that if contempt for religious sentiments did not form a striking contrast with the common opinions, those who profess to feel such contempt, would quickly change their sentiments. They very often only consider, in a superficial manner, the pernicious tendency of their maxims, whilst they believe themselves still
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in the opposition ; but were they ever to obtain a majority on their side, being then no longer stimulated by the pride of singularity, they would probably very soon discover the absurdity of their principles, and consequently relinquish them.

There are, no doubt, a great number of worthy and truly virtuous persons, who, though they highly value the truths and precepts of Religion, are nevertheless the prey of doubt and uncertainty, and thus become the constant victims of their own unsettled minds. But men of this description do not aim at dominion : On the contrary, they rather wish to be confirmed by the example of those whose confidence is more assured. They sincerely venerate those happy sentiments which, unfortunately, they feel themselves unable to adopt with a sufficient degree of confidence. They would endeavour to support their feeble hopes, by that assurance which Christianity inspires ;—Yes, they even respect the enthusiasm of piety ; because it is far better to yield to the emotions of a lively imagination, than to oppose, with cold indifference, such opinions as are calculated to diffuse general happiness. Then, if among such persons, there were some, to whom nature had granted superior wit or eloquence, they would studiously avoid exerting these talents to disturb the repose of those peaceable souls, who yield,
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with implicit confidence, to all the gentle emotions which Religion inspires. A man of good sense would never allow himself to spread sadness and despondency all around, in order to show that he contemns some vulgar prejudices; or that he may make some ingenious distinctions concerning particular parts of the established forms of Religion. This would be as absurd as to stop the progress of an army, when advancing towards the enemy, in order to discriminate, with scientific accuracy, the different tones of the warlike instruments of music. Upon a similar principle, the frivolous, though bold discourses of some philosophers, are, in my opinion, often most grovelling, when they aspire at great things, and boast of the extent and loftiness of their views.

I will not address myself to those who deny even the existence of a God. Alas! if they will be so unhappy as to shut their eyes against this resplendent light,—if their souls be so devoid of sensibility, as not to be affected by the comfortable truths which depend on this grand thought,—if they will still be deaf to the powerful voice of nature,—if they will trust more to feeble reasoning, than to their internal feelings, at least, let them not spread their baleful doctrine, which, like the head of Medusa, would transform all who approached it into stone: Let them remove from our sight that hideous monster,

fter, or let his hoarse hissing be only heard in the dreary solitude of their own heart : Let them compassionate the distress, the despair, into which the whole human race would be plunged, were that mild and vivid light, to which we look up, as our guide and consolation, ever obscured : In short, if they can really persuade themselves that morality can be reconciled with atheism, let them give the first proof of it, by remaining silent. If they cannot, however, abstain from publishing their deplorable opinions, at least, let some remnant of generosity induce them to inform us of their dangerous tendency, by placing in the front of their works this terrible inscription of Dante's : *Lasciat' ogni speranza voi ch' entrate* *.

* The inscription over the entrance of Hell, " Abandon every hope, ye who enter in."



C H A P. XVI.

The same Subject continued.—Reflections on Intolerance.

THE surface of the earth contains nearly the two hundred and fortieth part of the superficies of the different opaque bodies, which revolve round the luminary placed at the centre of our system.

The fixed stars are, in all probability, suns, which, like ours, enlighten and fertilize planets similar to the world we inhabit.

An eminent Astronomer *, has of late discovered fifty thousand of such stars, in a zone of fifteen degrees in length, and two in breadth,—a space which corresponds to the thirteen hundred and seventy-fourth part of the celestial sphere.

Now, were we to suppose as many to be contained in every equal section of the firmament, the number we might discover, would amount to nearly sixty-nine millions.

Were

† Dr HERSCHEL.

Were then, each of these stars the centre of a planetary system similar to this of ours, we should form an idea of a number of habitable worlds, whose extent would be sixteen or seventeen thousand millions of times greater than the surface of the earth*.

However much the ingenious invention which assists us in exploring the ethereal regions, may be susceptible of improvement, yet, even at the period when it should arrive at its greatest perfection, the space that could fall within the reach of our astronomical knowledge, would only be an undistinguishable point, compared with the immense extent which our imagination can represent.

In short, our imagination itself, as well as all our mental faculties, may perhaps be considered as only a small degree of infinite intellectual power, and the most extensive views which it
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* It may be said, that the fifty thousand fixed stars perceived by Dr Herschel, being the result of observations directed to the *via lactea*, or milky way, we cannot expect to discover an equal number in other parts of the heavens, of a like extent; but independent of those stars which Dr Herschel distinguished, he reckoned there were twice as many more, of which he had only an instantaneous glance. See the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 1784. Dr Herschel has probably, since that time, made new discoveries, which have not yet reached me. I find in his paper read to that illustrious Society, that he considers the new telescope as being still *in its infancy*; these are his own words.

can suggest, merely as a slight sketch of universal existence.

What an insignificant atom, then, does our earth appear, when compared with that immensity which the human mind vainly strives to grasp? How diminutive does it seem, when compared even with those numerous terrestrial bodies, whose existence science has either actually discovered, or rendered probable by rational conjectures?

Can we then believe, that the inhabitants of this minute particle of dust, and indeed only a very few of them, have a right to assert, that they alone are acquainted with the true mode of worshipping the Creator of the universe? Their dwelling is an imperceptible point, amid the immensity of space,—their life a fleeting moment amid eternity,—they pass away like the rapid glance of lightning, amid the course of time, where ages of ages disappear: How then dare they announce to the present and all succeeding inhabitants of the earth, that none can escape the vengeance of Heaven, who shall alter one title of their ritual? How contracted must their notions be of the relations established between the God of the universe, and those transitory beings, those atoms, dispersed through the vast extent of nature? Let them endeavour to lift up one extremity of the veil that covers so many mysteries,—let them look up and view, for a moment,

moment, those stupendous spheres which roll on in their course,—let them contemplate the infinity of wonders that appear in the vaulted firmament, amid that awful immensity which overpowers our imagination ;—and, at that moment, let them judge if they should expect, by exterior forms, or the pomp of their ceremonies, to render their adoration and homage acceptable to the Omnipotent. Shall we then imagine, that we can, by the pride of our opinions, merit the regard of the Supreme Being ? Is it not more reasonable to suppose, that all the inhabitants of the earth have access to His throne ; and that the Sovereign Ruler of the world has permitted all mankind to elevate their thoughts to Him, and to approach Him, by having such sentiments of humble admiration and gratitude deeply impressed on their hearts, as form the most natural and most intimate connection between man and his Creator ?

It is, no doubt, necessary that there should be some established form of public worship, and that there should be certain distinct symbols, certain solemn expressions of veneration, of which the essential characters ought never to vary, in order to fix and strengthen the opinions of the common people, whose minds are so easily affected by external ceremonies. Weak minds must easily find their way ; there must be no doubts nor uncertainties opposed to their course.

In short, it were to be wished, that the inhabitants of every country, who live under the same government and laws, should, at the same time, be united, by adopting the same mode of public worship : Thus the sacred tie of Religion would embrace the whole people in an equal manner, and the principles in which they are educated, would be supported and fortified by the force of example. But as moral rectitude must be the primary law of a Prince, its clear and distinct precepts ought, on all occasions, to be followed, without regard to any political considerations, however specious. It is by no means justifiable in a prince, to press on to any purpose, how wise soever it may seem, where he cannot proceed without employing injustice and oppression ; and this rule appears equally applicable to mens *principles* as to their *properties*. It would be easy to conceive a plan for distributing riches and fortune in such a manner as to contribute, more than any other, to increase the public treasure, and strengthen the hand of Government : But though the knowledge of such a system, may, in a general manner, influence the conduct of those who have the direction of public affairs ; yet it can never give them a right capriciously to seize the property of individuals, or to assign every one a rank in society according to their fancy. The same principles are applicable, in a still more forcible manner, to *opinions*. In order to
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direct the course of opinions, we ought to employ slow, gentle and cautious measures ; and a system of uniformity in the Religion of a nation, though of itself very desirable, would cease to be an advantage, were it necessary for its establishment to have recourse to violence, or even the least degree of constraint. A man's *opinion* must ever remain in his own possession ; and *conscience* is a property which, above all, must be held sacred.

Many people talk of the union of civil tolerance with religious intolerance. By the one Protestants are protected in Catholic countries, and Catholics in Protestant countries ; and by the other, every mode of worship is forbidden, except that which is established by law. But were the number of dissenters to become considerable, a great part of the nation would be deprived of public worship ; and Government ought not to appear indifferent to this circumstance, since it is of importance, that it should carefully maintain every institution which tends to the support of morality.

Nothing can possibly be said in favour of intolerance, when considered in its excess. We all know what opinion we ought to form of those cruelties and persecutions, of which history has transmitted an account, and of the conduct of those who gloried in such enormities. We cannot restrain our indignation, when we view the

faggots which are still kindled around those wretches, scattered over the face of the earth, of whom JESUS CHRIST himself, amidst his agonies, said, with such condescending goodness, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* It is indeed time to abolish for ever those horrible customs, those ignominious traces of our ancient frenzy. O God! dare they so torment Thy creatures in Thy name! Would they pretend to sacrifice the work of Thy hand to Thy glory? Would they ravish from feeble helpless beings, that portion of happiness which Thou hast bestowed on them, with paternal care? Ferocious tyrants, savage inquisitors, can you hope to obtain the favour of Heaven, by mutilating the members, and tearing the bosoms of those unhappy mortals, who rather merit your pity, were you capable of feeling that gentle emotion? The God of Mercy and Goodness rejects such offerings,—and these human sacrifices are an abomination in His sight. Why shall not men, who are themselves ever subject to mistake, forgive the errors of others? Alas! if infallibility of reason and judgment were our only title to Divine Benevolence, every one of us might cast down his eyes, devoid of all hope.

Those who arrogantly boast, that they are acquainted with the only mode of worship agreeable to the Supreme Being, immediately lose their claim to our confidence, when, by shewing

ing a spirit of intolerance, they deviate so evidently from the character with which they ought to be impressed by the idea of a God, who is the Protector of human weakness. But the absurdity of pretending to inspire faith by acts of rigour and severity, has been so often and so clearly demonstrated, that I need not dwell upon a question which common sense may at once determine. I will, however, make one observation, which, I hope, may be sufficient to intimidate the consciences of inquisitors, and all who adopt their detestable maxims: Since the operation of the mind can only be influenced by reasoning, every attempt to accomplish this purpose by violence, may be considered as an attack made on the doctrine of the spirituality of the soul,—an indirect association with materialists: For we must admit the identity of *matter* and *thought*, before we can believe, that compulsion and rigorous treatment can influence mens opinions. We must regard man as a passive being, governed by mechanical laws, before it is possible to suppose, that, with the apparatus of torture, a *sensation* can be excited which, by some incomprehensible means, may produce the same effect as *judgment* and *persuasion*.

Because the indignant emotions of the heart are more powerful than the cool arguments of offended reason, we feel a strong resentment against intolerance; independent of this, such ty-

ranny would only merit our contempt, as indicating a singular meanness of soul. Who can remember without pity, those unhappy dissensions so long maintained amongst mankind, in which so many weak and blind zealots inconsiderately devoted themselves to support the vanity and unintelligible tenets of some self-important dogmatist? The folly of such disputes instantly appears on cool examination; and we need only to consider them in an abstract manner, in order at once to discover their absurdity and insignificance.

It is only by diffusing knowledge and wholesome instruction, that we can hope to suppress enthusiasm and intolerance; and we ought to beware of the dangerous services which a spirit of indifference seems to offer: It would only be exchanging one evil for another equally fatal, were we to endeavour to free men of fanaticism, by destroying the fundamental principles of religion. No worthy sentiments, no salutary opinions, could subsist, were the various errors which have crept around them, to be torn away with a rash and violent hand; and were the evil we find so constantly blended with every species of moral order, to be the occasion of condemning the whole system indiscriminately.

Let us then, with pleasure, acknowledge the advantages which have accrued from the labours of those eminent writers, who have defended the
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cause of toleration with energy and zeal; for such works may be justly esteemed amongst the most essential benefits we have derived from the union of science and genius. It must, however, be remarked, that some of those writers have forfeited, in a great measure, their claim to merit, by endeavouring to degrade Religion in general, in order to attain their purpose. Such a conduct was unworthy of men of enlightened minds and superior genius, who, more than others, ought to assign limits to reason, and never despair of its influence. What should we think, if, even among those who so successfully attack the tyranny exercised over conscience, some should be found intolerant in defence of their own systems? What if we could accuse them of despising, and even hating those who do not concur with them; and if, by an ill-founded imputation of pusillanimity or hypocrisy, they endeavour to calumniate those who do not adopt their sentiments? How inconsistent, too, does their conduct appear, when they sometimes forget their professed incredulity, and raise a loud clamour about the miseries to which mankind are subjected, and the pretended disorders of the universe, in order to disprove the existence of a God, and of His Providence! One would think, that having overthrown the empire of the Deity, that they might remain the sole legislators of the world, they, at length, seemed to regret the want of a

rival, and wished to rebuild the temple they themselves had demolished, there to erect a vain idol, which they might insult. In short, how absurd is their rancour against those who reject their doctrines, since, according to their professed system of *fatality*, reason loses its sway, and the master as well as the disciple, is equally subjected to the laws of blind necessity?

To gain an ascendancy over the mind by the power of eloquence, is indeed a great advantage; for such an authority is not confined to any time or place; but to acquire a right to such an extensive reign, we must renounce fashionable opinions,—the counsels of vanity, and the instigations of self-love, and be only actuated by that great and universal concern, the happiness of the whole human race.

I would not, however, wish to prohibit the candid philosopher, or the man of genius, from treating of any subject that may occur. For there are abuses and prejudices every where, which can only be removed, by such a train of reasoning as may enable us to approach toward the truth. But as there is a philosophy for our *thoughts*, there is likewise one for our *actions*. Thus, I would wish, that men of superior genius, who perceive more clearly than others the moral order of things, would treat with caution and circumspection what relates to such opinions as are most essential to our happiness;—that a degree

gree of respect should be always shown to these opinions, while they censure fanaticism and superstition, and that prudence should restrain them from reprobating with too much asperity, certain ancient and established principles, in order to substitute their new doctrines.

Such a wish is far from being fulfilled. We cannot help lamenting the design of the greater part of those authors who have, of late, written on religious subjects. Some have endeavoured artfully to destroy, or at least relax, the salutary band which unites man to the idea of the Supreme Being; others lurk in some mystic notion, as in a dark den, indiscriminately denouncing anathemas against every kind of doubt and uncertainty, and confounding, in their rigorous censures, the accessory ideas with the principal opinions.

However, though they take a course so opposite, they both unfortunately concur, in placing the essential principles of Religion on the same footing with its mere symbols and external ceremonies: But they are influenced by very different motives. Some act with a view of making religious zeal serve to defend every particular of the worship of which they are the ministers; others, actuated by motives of self-love, readily admit this confusion of religious principles with mere exterior forms, in order that they may undermine Religion itself, while they only
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attack its out-works. These combatants are, however, equally mistaken in the ground they have chosen.

It is now more than ever, become necessary, to recommend Religion with wisdom and moderation, and by that gentle language, where reason and sensibility are happily united, which is so congenial with the mild spirit of evangelical morality. It is by such means alone, that we can expect, at present, to maintain the influence of the most salutary principles. Men are easily hurried beyond the mark, while their minds are unable to perceive any precise limits; but the daily and rapid progress of knowledge obliges us, at this time, to use more circumspection. The imagination must be restrained, and must give way to reason. But though it may be very proper and necessary to animate reason, yet now it would be in vain, should any one attempt to disguise it. False notions alone need the aid of exaggeration; we may say, that these naturally tend to extremes, in order to escape the investigation of reason and good sense, by means of which their absurdity would be instantly detected.

I will conclude with observing, That both those who endeavour to relax all the ties of Religion, with a view to free us from superstition, and those who, to strengthen them, have recourse to intolerance, equally miss their aim. The hatred so naturally excited by every kind of violence

lence and constraint in matters of opinion, creates an aversion to Religion; in the minds of those persons who are insensibly led to consider this excellent system as the motive or pretext for a blind spirit of persecution. And attacks directed against religious opinions in general, engage well disposed minds, to adhere more strenuously to those customs and forms, which appear to them the most proper mode of adoring the Supreme Being,—in the same manner, as we never fail to redouble our zeal for a friend, when we are amongst people who seem disposed to abuse him.

Let us now, for it is surely full time, unite with one accord, in rendering to the Supreme Being sincere worship, suitable to the dignity of the Creator and Preserver of the universe. Let us now for ever banish severity and superstition; but let us beware of that fatal indifference, which is the presage and the cause of so many evils: And when we have established the empire of sound reason, let us adhere with firmness to those salutary opinions that are thus happily freed from errors; and let us resist, to the utmost of our power, the treacherous attempts of those who would deprive us of our hopes, on pretence of guarding us against the deviations of imagination. Yes, a Religion, disengaged from the passions of men, in its native purity and beauty, ought ever to dwell amongst us. Public order, private happiness, equally demand it: All our
reflections

reflections ought to lead us to elevate our souls towards that Omnipotent Being, whose existence all nature declares aloud. Religion, well understood, far from being the origin of rigour or violence, is the foundation of every social virtue,—of every mild and indulgent sentiment. In this light we ought to view it, and follow its dictates. We have no right to tyrannize over the opinions of others, or to give despotic laws to the mind; and we ought carefully to remark, that even a moderate and rational Religion itself, can only guide us in the path of virtue and happiness, by equally addressing, with patient and unremitting assiduity, both our reason and our feelings.



C H A P. XVII.

Reflections on the Morality of the Christian Religion.

THE course of my subject naturally leads me to make a few reflections on a matter which has been often treated: But, in order to avoid, as much as possible, the common track, I shall confine myself to the consideration of those particulars of evangelical morality, which seem, in a peculiar manner, to distinguish its sublime doctrines.

The most evident characteristic of Christian morality, is that spirit of charity and forbearance, which breathes throughout all its precepts. The ancients, no doubt, honoured the beneficent virtues; but that precept which recommends the *poor* and the *weak* to the protection of the *opulent* and *powerful*, belongs essentially to our Religion. With what anxiety, and benevolence, does the great legislator of Christianity, return continually to the same sentiment, the same concern! The tender emotions of pity, always
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lend a pleasing and irresistible force to his persuasive eloquence : But, above all, I admire the important lesson he gives, when pointing out the close connection between the duties we owe to the Supreme Being, and those we owe to men. Having termed the love of God, *the first commandment of the law*, the Evangelist adds, *and the second, which is like unto it, is to love thy neighbour as thyself*,—The second, which is like unto it! How simple, yet how comprehensive is this expression? Can any thought be more interesting, more sublime, than the idea of God himself being ready to discharge the obligations of the unfortunate? Where can we find any principle of morality, whose influence may equal this exalted sentiment? The poor, the miserable, however abject their state, seem, as it were, surrounded with rays of glory, when our love of humanity can be viewed as an expression of our love of God; and the mind is no longer lost in contemplating the infinity and incomprehensible attributes of the Creator of the universe, when we hope to maintain an habitual intercourse with Him, by services rendered to our fellow creatures. Thus, one great thought diffuses a new and brilliant lustre over our duties, and bestows on the most metaphysical ideas, a substance accommodated to our feeble organs.

Justice, respect for the laws, and the duties we owe to ourselves, may be considered as proceeding,

ing, in some measure, from human wisdom: *Goodness* alone, of all the virtues, possesses a different character. There is, in its ineffable essence, somewhat that irresistibly imposes respect; and it seems to bear an immediate relation to that first intention, which we must ascribe to the Creator, when we aspire to trace His motive in forming the universe. Goodness then, is the original virtue, or, so to speak, the primitive beauty, that has preceded the creation and time itself. Thus, the warm exhortations to benevolence and charity contained in the Gospel deserve our most serious attention, and should elevate our thoughts, by reminding us, that through their means we become united to a sentiment more ancient than the world, and to which we owe our existence, and our enjoyments, and our hopes*.

If from these elevated contemplations, we descend to the consideration of such political principles as are most extensive, we will there remark the influence of a fact, which I formerly had occasion to consider, but which I will now treat under a different point of view. The unequal

* Methinks I perceive the traces of those philosophical ideas, in the reproof which Christ gave to one of his disciples, who called him *Good Master*. 'Why callest thou me *good*?' says he, 'there is none *good* but God.'

equal division of property has introduced, amongst mankind, an authority resembling, in a great measure, that of masters over their slaves: It may be even said, with truth, that the empire of the rich is still more independent; for they are not bound constantly to protect those from whom they require services. The taste and caprice of those happy favourites of fortune, fix the terms of their convention with men whose only patrimony is their time and strength; and as soon as this convention is interrupted, the poor man, absolutely separated from his rich master, is again left exposed to all the accidents and hardships incident to his situation. He is obliged instantly to offer his labours to other dispensers of subsistence and, may thus experience, several times in a year, all the distresses and anxieties which necessarily arise from the uncertainty of his resources. No doubt, the support of the laws has been given to this constitution, on the plausible supposition, that amid the multiplicity of social relations, a certain balance or equality would take place, between the *necessities* of the poor, which oblige them to solicit wages, and the *wants* of the rich, which engage them to accept their services. But that equilibrium cannot possibly be established in a precise and uniform manner, since it is the result of a multitude of uncertain combinations, and accidental occurrences, that are subjected to no positive direction.

rection. However, since it has been found necessary, in order to secure the distinction of possessions, to leave the fate of the greater number of men to a sort of chance, it becomes indispensably requisite to discover some salutary principle, capable of tempering the abuses that might arise from the unrestrained exercise of the rights of property. That happy and consolatory principle can only be found, in an obligation of *benevolence* imposed on those who have arbitrary rule, and in a universal spirit of *charity* recommended to mankind in general. Such sentiments, and the duties which flow from them, are the only resource of the unfortunate, and can alone mitigate the hardships of this system, in which the lot of the greater part of a nation, depends on the casual agreement of the *conveniencies* of the rich, with the *necessities* of the poor. Yes, without the aid and intervention of this most estimable of all virtues, the most numerous class of mankind would have just reason to regret the social institutions, which, at the expence of their liberty, have intrusted the opulent with the care of their subsistence. Thus, *charity*, so amiable in every respect, becomes, at once, the *moral* and *political* principle, which serves to conciliate *personal liberty* with the imperious laws of *civil right*.

I know not if ever the moral precepts of Christianity have been considered under this

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point of view : But the train of these reflections leads us to perceive the high importance of those salutary doctrines, which place in the first rank of our duties, a spirit of benevolence and charity, and which afford to those essential virtues, all the force and stability that religious sentiments can impart. Thus, while the doctrines of Christianity exalt our minds, its sublime morality joins, as it were, hand in hand with our laws and institutions, in order to sustain those that are truly conformable to reason, and to remedy the inconveniencies which necessarily result from the imperfection of human wisdom.

Christian charity is by no means limited to mere pecuniary sacrifices : Its precepts extend to those generous acts of self-denial, to which only Religion can render human nature adequate. By its influence, some persons are led to descend, with a firm step, into those dreary abodes, where the culprit is a prey to remorse and despair ;—and, when all his kindred and his friends have forsaken him, he beholds a comforter, who, impelled by religious sentiments alone, comes to commiserate his unhappy state, and shed a ray of peace and consolation on his afflicted soul. These principles also engage some people to renounce the world and its hopes, in order to devote themselves entirely to the service of the sick, and to the exercise of those melancholy and unpleasing duties, in which they persevere, with a degree of assiduity, that the

the hope of the most splendid reward could never excite. This indeed is disinterested and exemplary virtue!—unfeigned and truly admirable piety! What love and regard is then due to the sublime sentiment which can inspire such painful self-denial. Every precept which is merely human, must necessarily be regulated by ideas of *right* and *justice*. It is peculiar to Christianity to impose duties, of which the foundation is placed beyond the narrow circle of personal interest and worldly concerns. I know not how it is, but, amid the diversity of opinions, one cannot help being deeply affected, by contemplating the final prospect which the Gospel presents: It exhibits a view awfully sublime, of that last, that eternal day, when every action, every thought, however secret, will be disclosed, in presence of the whole universe, and when God Himself shall be our judge. And while we expect to hear a recital of all the various virtues and vices which have led men to celebrity, we find that the Divine Judge has chosen a single quality, a virtue without splendour, as our claim to a happy immortality. He pronounces these few memorable words, which comprehend the whole compass of our duty: *I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a prisoner, and ye visited me. Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.*—Ah! how

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pleasing it is, to contemplate the triumphs of goodness,—to see it exalted under every possible form ! We feel so many wants,—such weakness, and such a deficiency of our own powers, that *goodness*, the most sublime and precious of virtues, seems to be our only safeguard, and, as it were, the mysterious band of all nature.

The spirit of charity, so essential in its strict interpretation, is also applicable to those marks of attention,—those delicate expressions of regard, which are due to the different degrees of knowledge and abilities amongst men. In this respect also, society has its *rich* and *poor* : And a thorough knowledge of the secrets of our moral nature, would lead us to extend the spirit of charity, to a general benevolence, and an indulgent affability of manners, which protects others from feeling a painful sense of inferiority, and teaches us to treat with tender regard, that wondrous veil, purposely placed by an invisible and beneficent hand, between the light of truth, and such imperfections as we are unable to correct.

Christian morality always consults the welfare of mankind in general. In order to place all men on an equal footing, the Gospel takes cognisance of their private sentiments, condemning pride, and recommending humility. It tends to abolish those distinctions of rank, that appear so important among men, when they only view the little points that mark the gradations in our scale of vanity.

Religion

Religion teaches us that haughtiness and contempt only betray our ignorance and weakness: *What hast thou, that thou didst not receive? now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory?* How quickly does the pride of man shrink to nothing before these awful words? By continually reminding us of the shortness of life, and thus guarding us from its prevalent illusions, Religion seems also to conduct us to the same end. The enjoyments of this world, resemble the bustle that is made when the Monarch issues forth from his palace in his regal chariot,—the guards attend,—they hasten to line the way; but no sooner the warlike instruments have begun to sound, than the Prince, hurried on in his rapid course, (a true representation of human life) hears no more of these loud and empty honours.

The greater part of the moral instructions of antiquity, were addressed to man, considered either as an individual, solicitous about his own destiny, or as a citizen, bound to virtue by the duties he owed to his country; but neither of these modes of instruction was sufficiently extensive. When we counsel the solitary individual, no more is necessary than to endeavour to free him from those turbulent passions which endanger his happiness and repose; and every obligation imposed on the members of a political state, must participate of a spirit of jealousy, which, at the command of the Prince, may be converted into

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hatred. The Christian Religion, more enlarged in its views, overlooks those distinctions among men that arise from their being subjected to different governments. Christianity views all mankind as citizens of the same great society,—as members of one family, having the same origin, the same dependent nature, and the same desire of happiness. The morality of the Gospel while it enjoins the reciprocal duties of benevolence, makes no distinction between *the inhabitants of Jerusalem and of Samaria*: It considers in their most universal and noblest relation, of their intercourse with the Supreme Being. And, in this point of view, all the hostile divisions of kingdom against kingdom, and city against city, absolutely disappear. The whole race have an equal right to the protection and beneficence of the Author of Nature; may include every intelligent being in the same form of the alliance which unites Heaven and Earth.

The rich and the powerful having first laws, or at least directed their spirit, to the object in extolling justice, was to possess possessions and privileges. The Legislator, when speaking of this virtue, he had at heart the interest of the whole race. We might even say, that he transferred an ancient obligation into a new duty; the manner in which he prescribed it:

would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, is a precept truly remarkable, when we consider its vast extent. There are so many instances of cruelty and oppression, which elude the censure of the law, or the superintendence of public opinion, that we cannot too highly value this simple, this important maxim of Christian morality, which may serve as a guide and a measure to all our actions.

Religion also, in order to fix our determination, strengthens the authority of conscience. Every man has, within his own breast, a severe and quick-sighted judge, whose laws are sufficient to instruct him in his duty; for our most secret thoughts are tried by this judge, and at this tribunal, neither error nor disguise can possibly find access.

The case is very different, when we inflict censures on others. Their *actions* alone can fall under our observation, and the motives from which they spring,—the emotions and conflicts which accompany them,—the regrets and repentance that follow them, though all essential characters, equally escape our penetration. Thus Religion, ever wise and beneficent in its counsels, cautions us against forming violent and precipitate judgments. One cannot read without emotion, that lesson of forbearance, so mildly addressed to the crowd that surrounded the woman taken in adultery, *He that is without sin among you,*

let him first cast a stone at her. And how are we struck with admiration, when we see Religion so anxiously employed about the fate of those, whom suspicions or false accusations have dragged before the tribunals of men ! ‘ It is better,’ says Religion, ‘ that a hundred culprits should escape punishment, than that one innocent person should be condemned to suffer.’ How well doesthis tender solicitude correspond with the finest feelings of the heart ! Innocence abandoned to infamy, and surrounded with all the horrors of a shameful death, is the most dreadful spectacle that imagination can represent. We are so shocked by it, that we are ready to think, that in the sight of God, the whole human race is responsible for such a crime. Yes, under Thy protection, O my God, injured virtue and violated innocence, find a sure refuge ; nor is it in vain that they look towards Thee for comfort when pursued by men, and trust with confidence to that last, that awful day, when Thy justice will overtake their cruel persecutors.

I intend briefly to notice only a few of the peculiar characters of the Christian Religion : It is an idea perfectly new, to estimate the merit of our actions, neither by their greatness nor importance, but to value them merely as they are proportioned to our means and abilities. This system, which presents the same motive, the same hope of reward to the endeavours of the weak
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as to the exertions of the strong,—to the *widow's mite*, as to the most liberal donations of the opulent,—this system, so wise and so equitable, seems to animate our whole moral nature, and announce to us, that the vast circle of good actions, and social virtues, may be subjected to rules similar to those which govern the immense domain of physical nature, where the simplest plant or flower contributes, in some degree, to the perfection of the Creator's grand design, and composes one part of the harmonious universe.

The influence of Christian morality, however, extends still farther: For actuated by a spirit absolutely peculiar to itself, it sets a value on our intentions,—on such secret and internal determinations, as perhaps, by the intervention of various obstacles, may never be carried into execution. Christianity directs, as it were, our first thoughts, our secret inclinations: It reminds us, that we are continually in the presence of God: It cautions us to repress the suggestions of evil before they gain ground; In short it habituates us to the early practice of virtue, by strongly impressing on our minds, during our tender years, a constant sense of *good* and *evil*, of *right* and *wrong*; and thus cultivating in our hearts the love of integrity and order, before we are called on to practise these virtues amid the active scenes of life,

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But, while we are offered so many opportunities of meriting divine approbation, it is also necessary to guard us from sinking into despondency, through a continual sense of our errors and weakness,—and that in those moments, when we, as it were, lose our hold of that chain which connects us to the Supreme Being, some hope should still remain of regaining it. To assist our weakness, then, the Gospel offers to us the new, the excellent doctrine of Repentance, and the promises which are annexed to it. This noble doctrine, absolutely peculiar to the Christian Religion, prevents our relation with the Deity from being broke off as soon as it is perceived. The culprit may still hope for the favour of God; and, after contrition, he may thus find relief to his disquieted conscience. Human nature, that wondrous constitution, that mixture of spirit with matter,—strength with weakness,—reason with imagination,—certainty with doubt,—and will with hesitation, necessarily requires a legislation accommodated to such extraordinary circumstances. Man, in his most improved state, resembles an infant who attempts to walk, and falls, and rises, and falls again. Soon would he be lost to morality, were he, on committing his first fault, to forfeit every hope of repairing it. In this point of view, the idea of repentance is one of the most philosophical which the Gospel contains.

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The precept which earnestly commands us to do good in secret, and without ostentation, is also the happy result of profound wisdom. The Legislator of our Religion, undoubtedly perceived, that the praise of man was a foundation too unstable for the support of morality, and that vanity, when enjoying such triumphs, was too unsteady to serve as a faithful guide: But the most important truth, announced by this lesson of doing good in secret, is that morality would be very much circumscribed, were men only to study integrity in such actions as others might witness. There are but very few opportunities of doing good in public; but a man's whole life may be occupied by the practice of unseen virtues. In short, from that constant regard which Religion maintains for the dictates of conscience, the happiest consequences result. For it is evident that, when we have in our own heart a just and enlightened judge, that very judge becomes our friend and our comforter, when we are unjustly condemned, or when events do not correspond to the purity of our intentions. We then seem to have, as it were, two parties within us, the one aiding and sustaining the other on every occasion in which virtue unites them.

The severe censure which the Gospel every where inflicts on superstition, proceeds from a rational and enlightened principle. Men are ever too apt to confine their expressions of veneration

neration for the Deity, merely to certain exterior forms; because it is always easier to practise these, than to combat and subdue the passions. The human mind seizes with avidity, every extraordinary idea; and when these are, in part, of our own creation, they gratify our self-love and captivate our imagination. Man, when advanced to maturity, is not terrified by those phantoms which are so formidable in his infancy; but mysteries, occult causes, and extraordinary appearances, continue to make an impression on his mind. The wonders of nature being too immense for his narrow capacity, he allows himself to be led on by ideas more proportioned to his strength,—by mere superstition. We delight in trivial ceremonies, observances and scruples, because we ourselves are little, and because we would wish, notwithstanding our weakness, to know the ultimate extent of our obligations. Some persons, agitated by vain fears, or impelled by mistaken notions of religious duties, have recourse to superstition as a ready protection from the various distractions and anxieties of their minds. The doctrines of the Gospel tend to repress every disposition of this sort: For, on the one hand, they facilitate the practice of morality, by reducing the whole system of our duties to simple principles; and, on the other hand, they seem to offer us an easy access to the Supreme Being,—by teaching us to approach him
with

with the effusions of a pure and grateful soul,—by informing us that it is neither on Mount *Zion* nor Mount *Gerizzim*, that we are to raise an altar, but that every man's heart may become a temple, where he may adore the Eternal *in spirit and in truth*. The Christian Religion is the only one which, discarding ceremonies and superstition, retains us within the bounds of nature. It alone points out to us that a high degree of respect is due to the dictates of *conscience*,—that benevolence is the worship most acceptable to the Ruler of the universe,—and that our moral conduct is our best ground of future hope. The doctrines of the Gospel are founded on principles of sound philosophy; and all that men have added, is only a vain pageantry, and a more sounding tone.

Let us also join in grateful homage to Christianity, for having formed that sacred tie which unites the human pair, not in a temporary and casual manner, but for the whole course of their lives,—that union which affords support to the weaker sex, and domestic comfort to the other,—that pure alliance, which restrains men from sacrificing the unity and peace and happiness of families to mere capricious desires,—and which, by giving children an early example of the blessings that attend fidelity and duty, implants in their tender minds the seeds of every virtue. Religion alone has discovered, that amidst a world where selfishness so much prevails, our friend-

friendships require to be fortified by that strict union of interest and honour, of which marriage alone is the source. Hail sacred alliance ! happy band ! which endears all the enjoyments of life, and, by multiplying our objects of hope, sheds around us, so to speak, fresh rays of the divine beneficence, and strengthens every good, every pious thought : This benign tie seems to gain strength by time ; because all our sentiments of duty acquire a kind of sanctity, by the pleasing remembrance of a long and happy union ; and, in declining age, when the friendships of the world forsake us, this gentle alliance affords us encouragement and consolation. In short, Religion has wisely decreed, That nothing less than this venerable and lasting attachment, this generous and faithful friendship, should be permitted to have a lawful ascendancy over untainted innocence, and unfulfilled virtue, the brightest ornaments of the female sex. These principles are not, indeed, accommodated to the corruptions of the human heart : But the service that Religion proposes to render,—is to assist us in checking and correcting our irregular appetites,—to teach us to shun the snares and allurements of vice,—to maintain amongst us those noble principles, which are the foundation of public order,—and to diffuse around a salutary light, which may guide our steps in the right path of wisdom and happiness.

. Religion

Religion continually recommends those universal duties, which are known by the name of *private good morals*,—duties which some have pretended to consider as unconnected with the public interest, though they are evidently united to it by so many different ties. Although every private act of wisdom and virtue, may not be of immediate importance to society ; yet as morality must be cherished and reared up with care, like those delicate plants whose cultivation requires continual attention to preserve their beauty, no sooner would distinctions be introduced between *personal* and *public* morality, so as to afford a pretext for departing from our duty, when convenience required it, than all the charms of virtue would vanish, and its practice become every day more burdensome.

I am of opinion, that there exists a certain relation, more or less evident, amongst all things good and estimable. The idea of this beautiful alliance has in it, methinks, something so exquisitely pleasing, as to satisfy, we know not how, our most flattering wishes and our most exalted hopes. In order to illustrate this important truth, were I permitted to interrogate the Young Man whose virtues and talents are the most remarkable in Europe, I would ask him, if he had not experienced, that his filial tenderness, the regularity of his domestic life, the purity of his thoughts, and all his exemplary private qualities,
are

are united, by a peculiar tie, to those noble sentiments which make him appear with so much splendour as a statesman. But without looking so high, for an instance, who has not been often struck with admiration, at the noble candour and simplicity of manners, to be found in many worthy private citizens? Thus we clearly discover, that there may exist a certain dignity, and I may say grandeur, of character, independent of mere politeness in manners and discourse, or of that empty elevation which proceeds from birth, rank and fortune.

Although I only intend to glance at the principal advantages which we reap from the Christian Religion, I cannot omit noticing one consolatory doctrine which we owe to it alone: The felicity reserved for infant innocence,—precious and comfortable thought, to solace those tender, those afflicted mothers, who behold the objects of their affection snatched from their bosom, at a period when they are incapable of any merit, and when every hope must absolutely rest on the infinite goodness of the Supreme Being! I feel myself also irresistibly led to mix with the eulogiums due to Christian morality, a warm sentiment of gratitude, for those mild and paternal precepts, which are blended with all its doctrines; indeed, the peculiar character of its instructions, is to captivate our imagination, and to encourage our best, our most natural inclinations.

Sensi-

Sensibility, happiness and hope, are the firmest tie of a heart yet untainted with vice; and every emotion which elevates the mind to the idea of a God, dignifies, in our eyes, the instructions of morality, by constantly recalling our attention to the sublime perfection of their Divine Author.

In short, we cannot but admire that spirit of moderation which forms so striking a feature in the morality of the Gospel. We do not, indeed, find the same temperate spirit in the interpreters of the Christian doctrines. Not a few of them, hurried on by a false zeal, and rather disposed to speak in the name of a threatening master, than in that of a God full of mercy and peace, have exaggerated and multiplied the duties of men; and, in order to support their system, have often obscured the natural sense, and general import, of the precepts contained in the Scriptures: Sometimes, also, laying hold of a few detached words, they have constructed a new system of divinity, widely different, in many respects, from the intentions of the Apostles themselves. Servants always go farther than their masters: As the first thought does not belong to them, they are only occupied in making additions to it. Besides, a true spirit of moderation consists in a kind of proportion, which must ever be, in a great measure, unknown to mere imitators. Some resolution is necessary to set proper limits

even to virtue itself; and to determine the precise and exact measure of the numerous duties of men, requires the most profound and sublime intelligence. By such intelligence, did the Institutor of universal morality shew himself superior to those ages of ignorance, when men are continually rushing into extremes,—when they mistake superstition for piety, oppression for justice, and weakness for mercy; and when, by the exaggeration of every sentiment, they seek a kind of merit entirely incompatible with the immutable laws of wisdom. By the same intelligence, did that great Legislator rise above transitory opinions, to enjoin precepts adapted to all times and all ages, and to teach doctrines, not accommodated to the momentary humour of a people, but to the real nature of man.

We may easily discover other characters in Christian morality, which distinguish it from the lessons of philosophy; but in examining this serious and important subject, I have purposely avoided mentioning any thing which can at all be considered as imaginary. Great features are most properly employed in describing grand things; and any other manner would not be suitable to the respect due to this subject. I must say, however, that when I have contemplated attentively the various parts of Christian morality, I have found, that independent of general ideas and particular precepts, which continually
excite

excite deep admiration, there reigns, throughout these sublime doctrines, a spirit of benevolence and truth and wisdom, whose character we can perceive only by our internal feeling,—that faculty of the soul, which does not stop to distinguish objects, but penetrates, by a sort of instinct, to that original Goodness, that ineffable model, from which every generous intention, and every great thought has taken its first form.



C H A P. XVIII.

C O N C L U S I O N.

WHAT a time, what a place, have I chosen, to entertain people with discourses of Morality and Religion ! Even to conceive of such an undertaking, is a trial of courage. Every one is busily occupied with his harvest, —all his thoughts are employed about his affairs, and so much absorbed in the present moment, that every thing beyond it appears chimerical. When I was formerly engrossed by cares for the public welfare, and writing on my favourite topic, I could gain the attention of men by a train of reflections, in which their own fortune, and the political power of their country, were deeply interested : It was in the name of their most ardent desires that I engaged them to listen to me. But, in treating the subject of which I have now made choice, I must address myself to their original nature,—to those primary dispositions which are, in a great measure,

ture, effaced. Thus I must endeavour to revive the sentiments which I wish to direct, and to call forth a concern for the important matters which I desire to illustrate. When I consider the ordinary modes of thinking amongst men, I have great reason to fear, that I shall too often have for my judges, either such persons as are totally indifferent, or such as are too severe in their censures. But all the machinations of vanity appear trivial, when compared with the motives by which I have been actuated ; and if any of my reflections shall be found congenial with the sentiments of a feeling mind, and contribute, in the smallest degree, towards its happiness, I shall enjoy the best, the sweetest reward. Such was my wish, when I undertook to form, according to my small abilities, some reflections on the Importance of Religious Opinions.

Alas ! the more we know of the world, its phantoms and vain deceits, the more we feel the need of some great principle, that may elevate our souls above every discouraging event. Are we in pursuit of glory, honours, or the favour of others ?—every where do we find illusions and mistakes ; and it is our lot often to experience those crosses and disappointments which proceed from the passions or the weakness of men. If we leave our vessel in the harbour, we are dazzled by the success of others,—if we launch

forth into the deep, we are overtaken by the tempests, and become the sport of the winds. Activity, inaction, ardour and indifference, are all attended with peculiar cares and difficulties. No one is secure from the caprices of fortune; and even when we have attained our highest wishes, the very summit of our ambition, we no sooner become habituated to the wished-for enjoyment, than languor and apathy dissipate its charm. Our enjoyments can endure but for an instant; and we may say, that there is nothing perpetual but *change*. What need, then, have we to lay hold of those immutable principles, which are not the work of man,—which derive not their value from transitory opinions,—which are applicable in every case, and are equally necessary at the moment of triumph, as in the hour of defeat,—in prosperity as well as adversity, and become, as occasion requires, our consolation, our encouragement and our guide? How estimable, how efficacious would they appear, were we duly to consider them as the best support of order and morality? Every one would concur, to the utmost of his power, in supporting them, with the same degree of anxiety that becomes the citizens of a nation in securing the political interest of the state. Then would a new scene open to our view: Men of genius and science, far from following the counsels of vanity, or endeavouring to abolish the most beneficial

beneficial opinions, would exert all the powers of eloquence in their defence. The penetrating metaphysician would be eager to add to the common treasure of our hopes, every new discovery, and all the light which he gains from his indefatigable labours, and the perspicacity of his mind. The attentive student of nature, animated by the same sentiment, amid his investigations, would seize with avidity, every thing that can contribute to support the first principles of Religion, and the foundation of our sublimest hopes. The profound moralist, the philosophic legislator, would concur in the same design; and even such persons as are merely endowed with a lively imagination, would, in their eccentric flights, resemble those wandering travellers who, on their return from their random excursions, sometimes bring home to their country some new and valuable discoveries. In every part of *moral* as well as *physical* nature, there are paths which lead to the discovery of unknown secrets; and the harvest that may be gathered in the vast empire of nature, is as extensive as diversified. How delightful would be such general unanimity, in promoting this noble purpose! Amid such a happy confederacy, I have sometimes represented in imagination, a society of respectable persons, distinguished by their learning and genius, appointed to receive and arrange all new ideas that

may, at any time, be suggested, proper to confirm us in our most precious opinions. Thoughts of this kind sometimes occur to the solitary thinker ; but they are frequently lost to the public, because he happens not to possess sufficient talents, to connect and arrange them systematically ; and though such thoughts were of a nature merely relative, and only added, so to speak, one grain of sand to strengthen the banks raised on our shore, still each generation would transmit to the succeeding one, a richer heritage. We sometimes pompously enrol a new word introduced into our language, and the greatest geniuses of the age are called to witness the ceremony. Shall it not be esteemed as honourable an enterprize, to examine, to choose, and to adopt such ideas and observations, as may serve to enlighten us in the most important of all our inquiries ? One new thought, one new discovery of this kind, better merits a laurel, than the richest productions of eloquence and literature. Let us, for a moment, suppose, that in the most ancient nation of the world, the magi had preserved, from time immemorial, every new argument, every original idea, that had been advanced in support of our belief of the existence of a God, and the immortality of the soul ; and that they had, from time to time, progressively as discoveries were made, inscribed these in a religious code, entitled the Book of Happiness and
Hope,

Hope, how much would we esteem such a treasure ! With what reverence would we approach the ancient temple in which those superb archives were deposited ! On the contrary, were we to figure a sequestered retreat, where all the subtle arguments have been collected and preserved, by which men have endeavoured to overthrow or weaken those sacred opinions that unite the universe to a Sublime Intelligence, and the destiny of man to Infinite Goodness, Who amongst us would wish to enter that dreary abode ? Who would be desirous to explore those fatal registers ? Alas ! let us learn better to know our own nature, and let not the delirium of our passions conceal from us its wants. We need a God, such as Religion presents, wise, omnipotent, and merciful,—the first source of all good, and the kind dispenser of happiness to mankind. Let us open our hearts, and every faculty of our souls, to receive that brilliant light, and let us delight in diffusing it around us. Let us, in our youth, be deeply impressed with those sentiments, which are equally necessary at every period of life,—let us cherish them in our more vigorous age, and, confirmed by mature reflection, let them become our consolation in the decline of life. Without this thought, what avail all the enchanting beauties of nature ? What avail the majestic powers of the human mind, and all its wondrous conceptions, if separated from its noble origin ?

origin? How hapless would be the condition of those affectionate souls, that are endowed with tender sensibility, were they deprived of the only foundation of their hope? Forgive me, O Divine Ruler of the world! if, forgetting my own weakness, and yielding to the ardent impulse of my heart, I have presumed to speak to men of Thy Existence, Thy Infinity and Thy Goodness! Forgive me, if, though lately tost amid the tumultuous waves of passion, I dare to raise my thoughts to the realms of Eternal Peace, where Thou dwellest, surrounded with Thy glory and omnipotence! Ah! I now see more and more, how much we ought to love Thee and confide in Thee! Men capriciously exalt or depress their favourites; and when they have availed themselves of the talents devoted to their service, they too often forsake their victim, or crush him like a reed. There is in the universe but one immutable source of justice and perfect goodness,—one consolatory thought to solace us in every situation; yet we constantly wander from that happy idea, in our vain pursuit of felicity. There are certain illusions, which seem to fascinate the greater part of mankind, and make them forgetful of every rational, every religious and natural sentiment, which may elevate their thoughts to the Supreme Being. Blind worldly passions, and the anxious pursuit of honour and fortune, only serve to harden the heart.

Every

Every thing about them is dangerous, selfish and infipid ; they can only lead to a vain name, and empty pomp. Let the emulous, the ambitious, thus view the objects of their pursuit. Though the heavens should be obscured, and the earth become darkened,—though futurity should be lost to your view, would ye be satisfied with a faint glimmering light, that only permits you to discern the fawning homage of your dependents ? But how shall these servilities, in which you delight so much, be rendered permanent ? What means shall you employ to retain that humble adulation which is bestowed on you by others, and for which there are so many competitors ? How much happier are those persons who are actuated by a sentiment of rational piety, that enlightens their principles, moderates their passions, and bends them, so to speak, to the lot of man ! Piety, of this sort, may be considered as our constant guardian, our kind and faithful friend ;—who, with pleasure, allows us the enjoyment of all the blessings of life, and contributes to our happiness, by reminding us of the gratitude that is due to our most bountiful Benefactor ;—who permits us freely to use our talents and faculties, but, at the same time, teaches us to keep virtue and morality in view, that we may not deviate from the right path, nor have cause of regret ;—who prevents us not from pursuing glory and ambition, but, by still reminding

us of their fleeting and inconstant nature, preserves us from a fatal intoxication ;—who is ever present with us, not to disturb our enjoyments, or impose unnecessary restraints, but to temper all our thoughts and actions with the mild spirit of wisdom and moderation. In short, amidst adversity, and in declining age, when our boasted strength fails us, piety becomes our most effectual comforter. It calms the remorse we feel for past errors, by pointing out an over-ruling Providence,—and quiets our fears, by presenting hopes more worthy of our attention than all worldly concerns. These reflections proceed not from any sentiments of melancholy, which my present situation impresses on my mind. I should have feared this, were I not conscious that I always was of the same opinion, and that the various circumstances of a life frequently perturbed, had shown me the necessity of reposing on some principle independent of men and casual events. In my present lonely condition, driven into solitude by an unforeseen accident *, I experience, it is true, more than ever, the need of those rational sentiments, those great and sublime truths, which I have always loved, and which I have here recommended to men, at a moment when they seem, alas ! too much inclined to neglect them. How much are they mistaken in their calculations ! They trust to-day

* I had begun this chapter during my exile.

day in their own strength, but to-morrow they will feel their weakness : By turning their thoughts from the termination of life, they hope to remove the fatal boundary ; but already the signal is given, and even now they hear the knell of their last hour. Ah ! how can we rashly sacrifice those comfortable truths which present us with a future prospect beyond this world and all its concerns ! Should we not rather seek after them with diligent anxiety, and eagerly pursue their traces, were they ever, by any means, unfortunately effaced.

It may perhaps be said, that all these ideas are vague, and ill adapted to the humour of the times. But when one is placed at a certain distance from the theatre of ambition and vanity, Can any thing appear more vague to him than the passions of others ? Are men occupied in consulting our interest or happiness ? No : they seek precedence, and eagerly repulse their rivals ; and though they now and then pronounce the name of *public good*, yet it is only, as it were, a watch-word which they have borrowed, in order to pass through our ranks without suspicion. Where shall we then find any real tie, or, so to speak, any common rendezvous, but in those immutable ideas, which are equally applicable to the whole human race,—which come to assist the human mind at that point where reason fails, and present, not indeed such objects as may gratify

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tify our transitory desires, but things more estimable, such as may interest our whole life, our existence, our nature, and, above all, that sublime spirit, which constitutes our true grandeur, but whose various relations, and whose ultimate degree of power, must ever remain, in a great measure, unknown to us.

F I N I S.



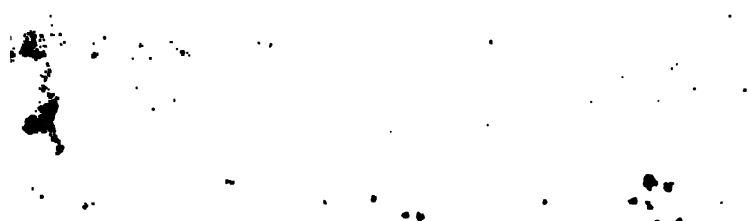


This Book is one of the very few benefits comparatively arising from the the Revolt of 1848.

Necker, James. born at Geneva. 1732.

died at Copet, Switz^d. 1804. aged 72.

French Revolution. 1789. King of France
murd^d. 1793, Jan'y.



32. (a) The actual feeling of each is
the test of his lot. And is there in
fact that difference among men which
is thus expressed? — This should be
placed with the arguments in the pa-
pers immediately preceding.

Happiness. 46. Religion.

Hope. 67.

TF. 99.

Protestants. or. Fiches. 120.

Epist. 126.

